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LIFE
AFTER THE
MIND OF CHRIST
HAMILTON THOM



LAWS OF LIFE
AFTER THE
MIND OF CHRIST

The Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.—ST. PAUL.

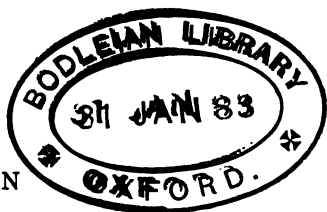
DISCOURSES

BY

JOHN HAMILTON THOM

The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God.—ROMANS viii. 16.

Let the same mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.—PHILIPPIANS ii. 5.



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AS RESPECTIVELY REPRESENTING

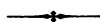
THE MINISTERS AND LAYMEN

AT WHOSE DESIRE IT HAS BEEN PUBLISHED

THIS VOLUME IS

INSCRIBED.

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THE LIFE OF A CHRISTIAN, CONFORMING TO THE FAITH OF CHRIST.

I.

Christianity, the Impersonation of the Love that is in God.

MATT. v. 17:

"I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil."

ROMANS iii. 10:

"Love is the fulfilling of the Law."

VOLUMES have been written in the attempt to define the "Peculiarities of Christianity." It was taken for granted that it must have an unique essence, whereas its distinction is in having an unique fulfilment. It was forgotten that its supreme characteristic, Catholicity—the intuitive recognition of its intrinsic beauty by every soul that is alive—its power, wherever it can show its presence, to kindle life in souls that before seemed dead—are inconsistent with unshared attributes, with the isolation of a nature separated from the fundamental aptitudes and sympathies of human-

kind. Nothing that is catholic can be peculiar, except in the degree in which it developes and harmonizes common properties.

Christianity has its crowning distinction ; but this does not consist in introducing new elements into the spiritual world ; it consists in perfecting, above all in impersonating, what was already there. Christ came to make all things new ; but renewal is not innovation or reversal ; it is exactly the opposite ; it is building upon the ancient foundations, it is growth from the original stock. Christianity is not the root of whatever is good in human nature, for that was in it from the beginning, its inspiration and its law ; nor is it the flower, the promise of the complete outcome, for that also was before in saints and prophets and all good men's lives ; it is the consummation, the full rounded fruit, and that never was before, and, except approximately, alas ! never has been since. Christ introduced no new germ into the human constitution ; man was made in God's image ; he combined the elements in a symmetry only foreshadowed as an ideal until he showed it in the actual, and quickened the real, ruling, nature that is in us into consciousness and tension by revealing in life the end for which we all are living. Christ came not to preach any new doctrine, but to make the Truth, the everlasting gospel of the life of God in the soul of man, known in its substance, in its concrete presentation.

If asked to declare, what then is distinguishing in Christianity, we can only say that Christ is the earthly fulfilment of our universal vocation, "Be ye perfect, even as your Father who is in heaven is perfect." This is the function of the Son of Man, to give men their Heavenly Father, the Father whom he knew, the God with whom he lived in communion, in the personal relations of spirit with spirit. To preach theologies would have been no new thing; to preach theologies in the belief that through them we are making acquaintance with realities, is an occupation and an illusion of which the world never wearies; but to have the living God mirrored in a human soul, as face answers to face in a glass, this was not the old work of announcing abstract truths about God, it was to reveal God Himself. We have no means of knowing God except by knowing His image in our own nature. The knowledge of God was lost to the world, because the image of God had been lost out of the soul. Christ, through obedience to the inward promptings, kept the mirror pure, without flaw or soil, and so manifested the Father in the Son. There is no other mirror, to which we have access, in which He can spiritually be seen as He is. Other mirrors, as those of outward Nature, are dead mirrors which have to convey their symbols to a living soul, there to be interpreted. How could we know God if we saw Him only in the reflection of a soul that is itself unclean, clouded, distorted?

If there had been no unsoiled mirror, we could have known God under no adequate living type. "If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also." "We, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord."

If, in addition to being the Truth in living presentation, impersonating in himself our spiritual relations to God and man, it is maintained that Christ came into the world to teach new doctrines, it is a simple test to ask, "What new doctrines?" Not the doctrine of God's Unity, for that was the central light of Hebrew inspiration. Not the doctrine of His Providence : "The Lord is my Shepherd ; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures ; He leadeth me beside the still waters. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me ; Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me." Not the doctrine of His Spirituality : "Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit ? Whither shall I flee from Thy presence ? Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid Thine hand upon me." Not the doctrine of His holy Spirit communing with our spirit, and purifying the fountains of our life : "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Thy presence, and take not Thy holy Spirit from me." Not the doctrine of Immortality : there was a class among the Jews marked

off by its disbelief, and to them Christ deemed it enough to say that the words they used implied the doctrine they denied : "He is not God of the dead, but of the living." Not the doctrine of His universal Fatherhood : "God created man in His own image ;" and St. Paul told the Athenians it was in the heathen poets, known of all men, because there is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding. Not the doctrine, that there is no acceptable Worship but spiritual service : "Sacrifice and offering Thou didst not desire: burnt-offering and sin-offering Thou hast not required. I delight to do Thy will, O my God: yea, Thy law is within my heart." Not the doctrine of religious Duty, with inexhaustible springs in the affections and the will : for the precept is of old, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength; and thy neighbour as thyself." No ; God did not begin to be the Father of Spirits in the reign of the Emperor Tiberius. If, then, every spiritual truth had from Him a witness in the soul before, what was reserved for Christ? What glory remained for him? The glory of accomplishment; the glory of fulfilment; the glory of being the holy child and fellow-worker of whom saints and prophets had felt the possibility and spoken; the glory of the obedience of Love, through which the Father and the Son were one.

Doubtless, if we pass out of the region of religion into the region of theologies, we readily find men declaring that Christ taught new doctrines about God. And here is exactly the test of what does, and of what does not, belong to the realities of Revelation. If it is concerned with schemes of salvation, with theoretical explanations of God's dealings with sinners and with sin, with a system of theological credits exhibiting how guilt may be forgiven and God remain holy, how a violated law may be vindicated and the violator escape,—then indeed Christianity may be represented as essentially a new dogmatic system ; but the new doctrines will be elaborations of the intellect on speculative difficulties supplied by itself, not one of which could be referred to the simplicity of Christ. Nothing belongs to the revelation that is in Christ which had not first a witness within the spirit through the whisper of the Father. Any doctrine that is not a fulfilling of the Law that is in our nature, of the Prophets that are in our souls, of which the Holy Spirit gave no hint from the beginning, may be true or may be false, but it belongs to theology, not to religion—it comes through the speculating intellect, not from the inspired soul. To the order of spiritual life already in the world, divinely given in its essence and its forecastings, Christ added nothing except—mark the grandeur of the exception—its completion. He was not the seed of our eternal life—that is from the Holy Spirit ; he was the

life itself made manifest. "I am come to fulfil;" "I am come that ye might have life, more and more abundantly." It is not that God began to be our Father in Christ, but that in Christ a Son was found, in all things loving, in all things trusting, in all things obedient. Then for the first time the world saw, in the living form of holy Love, the image in which we are made.

God's children, in this unlike His other creatures, do not grow by merely constitutional laws; the conditions of each energetic movement of our real life being of the nature of an effort in communion and co-operation with our Father's Spirit. We do not go on to our perfection by involuntary progress, but by listening for, and obedience to, the inspirations of God, who imparts from Himself the type of our being. Without this voluntary effort of communion we fall from a spiritual to a merely natural life, as creatures sustained by air or water would collapse when void of the element of their being. The element of our real life is intercommunion with God,—God opening the communion by the invitations and promptings of His Spirit, we keeping it open by the reverent hearkening of our souls and the devoted obedience of our wills. Men fall into evil as if it was the law of their being, not because evil, as evil, has an original root in our nature, but because we leave nature to go alone, without conscious reference to the personal living guidance,

which if we drop we lose the co-ordination of our being, our connection for the time with the regulating power of our spiritual life ; we are then, as it were, detached from the governing law of our nature. When we say of Christ that he restored to the world the image it had lost, we mean, as he said of himself, that he was never alone, never unguided ; that there were ever two wills concurrent in him, the originating and inspiring will of the Father, the consenting and co-operating will of the Son ; that the life which he lived was the life of God in him. "As I hear, I speak." "The works that I do, I do not of myself ; the Father who dwelleth in me, He doeth the works." Conscience itself is fellowship with a Prompter in our souls. If a man says, "I am alone ; I am self-sustained, self-developed ; I know no law but the law of my own individual constitution,"—in St. Paul's language, he is natural and not spiritual ; in that he is alone, he is not yet consciously a child of God.

If we accept it as the distinction of Christ that he was the impersonation of God's holy love in humanity, we still desire to know how his character was generated. How did it come into existence ? Out of what fountains did it flow ? Our proper perfectness is relative to the perfectness that reveals itself to us. Is there any principle of feeling and of purpose in us which, by responding to God at every point where He touches us, would develope in us also, in elemental

fulness, the image in which we were made? There is only one spring of spiritual life common to us and to God—love for what is good and holy. Perfect love is the essence of the Father; and to impersonate in human conditions and limitations the love breathed from the fountain Spirit the glory of Sonship, the substance of Christianity, the definition of Christ as revealer of God to man, and of man to himself. No new religious doctrine, capable of being conveyed in words, can be referred to Christ. His greatness is that, through the grace given him and the grace of his obedience, he was the reflected fulness of the love that is in God. It was not the affection of love working from itself, but love for God as He personally exists within the soul, that generated the character of Christ. Love is not abstract, no self-developed sentiment: it is an affection meeting the kindling touch of a living person, acted upon and drawn forth by the properties of that person. What might we become if the spring of spiritual love in us was acted upon by the properties, the personal approaches, of God, to the extent of the susceptibilities given to us! We might become as Christ. It is not that we have the image of God in us as an acorn has the image of an oak, and that we grow as the oak grows, from its environment, but that we have capabilities of feeling and responding to God's Spirit which, through the constraining energies of love, conform us to Himself. With us too

according to our **measure** of assimilating love, "Whatsoever the Son seeth the Father do, these things doeth the Son likewise." "What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" Christ did not give the vague, formless, unsubstantial answer, "Thou shalt love;" but, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God"—not with one part, but with every part of the nature to which He personally commends Himself—"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy mind, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength; and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,"—as we must do if we love the Father of us all. Now that, as a precept, was known before. But supposing the precept to be kept, what manner of men should we become, what is the human image this inspiring Love would give? That was not known. That was the question reserved for Christ to answer, not in words, for it cannot be answered in words, but in living manifestation as the incarnate Revelation. The end of Revelation is Life, is Character. Through the obedience of love, *to be* the Character that is the end of Revelation is the *differentia* of Christ, the substance and definition of Christianity. To meet this by raising a metaphysical question as to the possibility of perfectness in a human being, or in any being short of God, is altogether away from the mark, the betrayal of a half-hearted faith, the disowning of a full discipleship from a shallow form of unbelief. The question

is not of the *finality* of man or angel; and there is no question, as to the originality, or the completeness, of the Christian *type* of life. "God, who in divers portions, and in diverse manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us in His Son, who is the effulgence of His glory, and the very image of His substance." In no other way is it possible to define the peculiarity of Christ. He is the light that is in us when it has become life; the inspiring love when it is impersonated.

If still we are asked, How came this?—how came Christ to be an unique pattern of the life that is offered to us all?—we can only answer, *That* is the mystery not only of his, but of every other individuality. What makes one man differ from another in the type of his being? It is the secret of all personality. It is true of every genuine life, that it is hid, like Christ's, in God. How came Shakespere to transcend all others, and yet to be recognized by all others as, in his sphere, only a fuller representative of their own nature? It is his characteristic to be always natural; yet, whilst feeling him to be natural, we also feel that he is almost infinitely beyond our individual power of imagination or execution. I am not explaining, far less explaining away, the mystery of Christ; I only say it is no unique difficulty, though of exceptional degree. We all potentially are what by the grace of God we might be. He

did what we do not: he used the grace of God. How is it that one man differs from another in the holiness of his will? It is the same mystery. How is it that men seem to take equal delight in God, with their hearts, with their minds, with their souls,—and yet not love Him alike, or at all, with their strength, with their *Will*, with the great energetic powers that must become what they love, or else loathe themselves, and tremble and shudder at their own hollowness?

We may be told, as by Professor Tyndall in his sketch of Faraday, that Love is tender, yielding, sympathetic, and cannot prompt or sustain the great and awful attributes of a perfect form of Character. That is the fallacy of one who does not get beyond abstractions, who is thinking of the sentiment of Love evolving its object from itself. The true question is, whether we are capable, made capable by our Father, of a growing devotion towards every perfection that is in Him, when, by His Spirit in us, He has quickened us to the perception of it? What aspect of spiritual completeness, merciful or awful, melting as pity, inflexible as holiness, enterprizing and self-sacrificing as faith and hope, is not a love for some perfection that is in God, a love from which we know we should fall away, even in conception and desire, if we were not held up to its height by our personal clinging unto Him? A true love of God must embrace every element of power, every aspect of reality, from the softest glow of

compassion to the cleansing fire of holy indignation, if these belong to the Spirit of God, and God commends Himself to the spirits He has made. We have not to create, or to imagine, our own type of perfectness. That God does for us in coming Himself to a nature made in His image. If He does not do that, then the whole question falls to the ground; we are not religious beings at all, and are capable of no growth but the natural growth of circumstance and constitution. To love God "with all our heart," is to know the spiritual passion of measureless gratitude for loving-kindness and self-devotedness to goodness; to love Him "with all our mind," is to know the passion for Truth that is the enthusiasm of Science, the passion for Beauty that inspires the poet and the artist, when all truth and beauty are regarded as the self-revealings of God; to love Him "with all our soul," is to know the saint's rapture of devotion and gaze of penitential awe into the face of the All-holy, the saint's abhorrence of sin and agony of desire to save a sinner's soul; and to love Him "with all our strength," is the supreme spiritual passion that tests the rest, the passion for reality, for worship in spirit and in truth, for *being* what we adore, for *doing* what we know to be God's word, the commanding allegiance that has the collected might of the Will behind every spiritual desire to force it forwards to its end, the loyalty that exacts the living sacrifice, the whole burnt-offering that is our reason-

able service, and in our coldest hours keeps steadfast to what seemed good when we were aglow. The character of Christ, in its manifold unity, was the blended presence of all these forms of Love in one personality, each chastened and rounded by the coherence and impulse of the rest. Was there not the same holy love for men's souls in the searching, awakening words, "Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" as in the pleading, vindicating words, "Forgive them; they know not what they do"? The love that is of God is as holy as it is tender, as unyielding as it is unhating. Not of the love of God, but only of some one filament of religious sensibility taken for the whole, could it be true that it is feeble-hearted either in forcing ourselves on enterprize and sacrifice, or in looking for endurance, effort, martyrdom, from those we love, if through these lies the way of truth and holiness, of spiritual honour and peace with God.

It may be objected, that to define Christ as the impersonation of God's Love does not embrace the whole of his recorded being—that, for instance, the Resurrection is omitted. But the Resurrection, however historically regarded, makes no part of the genesis, or of the inner vitality, of Christ. Doubtless a belief in the Resurrection was of critical efficacy in converting the Apostles and the world, but it was of no efficacy in producing the soul of Jesus, and cannot enter into any definition of his personality. Though it has

worked as a gleam of light on God's imperishable union with His children, its immediate action was to lift the disciples from a Messianic to a spiritual conception of the kingdom of heaven. The Resurrection however interpreted, belongs to the scaffolding of Christianity, not to the soul of Christ.

What, then, are the considerations mainly concerned in the question, "What is it to be a Christian?" The distinctest and fullest answer to which words are adequate was given by Christ: "Be ye perfect, as your Father who is in heaven is perfect." The concrete answer was in his own personality, the reality of life which no statement of doctrines, no articles of belief, though they were all true and all accepted, could compass or picture.* In spiritual substance it is to have "the same mind in us that was also in Christ Jesus." It is to seek and serve God in the faith and hope which perfect love creates, delivered from the fear which perfect love casts out. It is to live in His presence; to watch for His visitings; to know through the depths of our being that a holy God who loves us must hold us responsible for our faithfulness to the quickenings of His grace; it is to have

* "Were I to define divinity, I should rather call it a *divine life* than a *divine science*; it being something rather to be understood by a spiritual sensation than by any verbal description, as all things of sense and life are best known by sentient and vital faculties."—*Smith's Select Discourses*, p. 1: Cambridge, 1859.

the large bountifulness of heart, and where possible of hand, of the children of Him who causes His sun to shine on the evil and the good, and makes His rain to fall upon the just and upon the unjust ; it is that fulfilment of the old commandment which makes the commandment ever fresh, in dear acknowledgment of claims that never can be cancelled, debts of the heart's own making, always being registered anew against itself : " A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another,—as I have loved you, that ye love one another ;" it is the love which cannot deny itself as God cannot deny Himself, and so will refuse no service and will countenance no wrong ; which can urge its dearest upon solitude, suffering, privations, sacrifice and death, if through these is their fellowship with Him who blesses ever and in all ways, but who will not go with us in anything that brings spiritual hurt, and will not spare us in anything that brings spiritual good.

It is but in a poor measure that any of us are Christians, in all the susceptibilities and in all the works of Love, in the vast range of its spirit from adoring humility for ourselves before God to self-forgetting enthusiasm for the kingdom of heaven ; but it is in the power of us all more and more to draw our being from the Holiest known to us, breathing in us or realized for us,—and by the most infallible and Christ-like way—the surest, the sweetest, and the hum-

blest—to make earthly life more and more heavenly, worshipping in spirit and in truth by honouring and serving our Father in honouring and serving His children.

II.

The Universality of Christianity.

JOHN xvii. 20:

“Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also that shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that Thou hast sent me.”

THESE words imply that there is to be no period of earthly progress in which men shall pass beyond discipleship to Christ: that his *method* is inexhaustible, himself a symbol of the living God, as fresh in significance, as uninjured by time, as the everlasting hills. Since they were spoken mankind has advanced indefinitely, but that vast and indescribable progress has not altered the *spiritual* position of humanity in relation to Jesus Christ. Not when he came to his own and his own received him not—when amid Judea’s low and fierce fanaticism, forestalling the progression of ages, he spoke of universal interests in a universal language—not then more signally than now was he the needed Saviour and Healer of men’s souls, the unapproached Teacher, the unworn Ideal, the only real Person to whom it would not shock the religious feel-

ings of mankind to apply the titles, Son of Man and Son of God. Humanity has been regenerated again and again since the expected Messiah of the Jews disappointed their fierce faith by assuming the spiritual Lordship of human-kind ; a new order of society has sprung up to which Hebrew Prophet and Heathen Sage would alike be strange ; so that no effort of the most instructed imagination can station us as perfect observers among the contemporaries of Christ : as a moral, a political, a social, a scientific, a religious being, man has again and again been new-born, but still Christianity holds its place. We stand but where the first disciples stood, far-off gazers—its kingdom of heaven to us as to them is a hidden land ; and though whither we go we know, and the way we know, yet unless we too repent and be converted, we cannot enter into this realm of God.

And all past changes are but heralds of future progress : each growth in grace and knowledge reveals more clearly the infinitude that lies before us ; the advance of our nature is as sure as the duration of time ; yet no one, whom now it leads, suspects that Christianity is to be left behind—no one fears that its spirit shall become too contracted, its motives too impure, its ideals too easy, its heaven too low ; and place the human soul where you will, Jesus—the Way, the Truth, and the Life—is still beyond it, a Way not trod, a Truth not fathomed, a Life not lived ; and we

are no nearer to any exhaustion of the riches that are in Christ than we are to having scaled the heavens when we reach a mountain's top.

This, to all who can say it heartily, is the greatest evidence of our religion, disclosing in it a kindred character with the vastness of creation, with the soul of man, with the Spirit of God. It appeared, comparatively speaking, in the spiritual youth of the world : it gave what men could take : it held in reserve a treasury of light to be poured upon the eye and the soul as they were able to bear it : as our sensibility to Goodness has increased, its perfect Pattern has come forth into fuller relief : as our Spirituality has strengthened, it has introduced us more directly to God ; common life has been transfigured, purer visions have come down out of heaven upon earth, new paths leading upwards have opened before our feet.

All this is only matter of observation : explain it as we may, Christianity *has* led the soul, and is now, as it ever was, in advance of the soul. There is no mark of age upon it : it is not tarnished by use and by long handling : men have not reached it and repeated it until they have wearied of it. It is as fresh to-day as when Jesus entered into the desert and brought it forth from the bosom of God. Spiritual Understanding, Aspiration, Affection—it has baptized them all into the life that was for the Light of the World, and now their purified sight can find nothing nobler than itself ;


it is still the holiest thought, the highest goal, the world possesses. Religious institutions decline and perish, the friends of the Bridegroom fail ; but the unfading Lord himself draws through all ages the souls of men, the Church of the living God.

This is the characteristic of Christianity that marks it as a Universal Religion. What, we may inquire, are the features which give it this character of universality, which make it one with the truth and with the operations of God—not hidden from the child, opening on the man, quickening the most advanced, filling the loftiest saint with the deepest lowliness?

I. Christianity, on one side of it, corresponds with Nature and with Providence in the *manner* of its teachings. It has, indeed, what they have not, both a spoken and an unspoken Word. Nature is a vast Symbol of God, where, though no voice is heard, to reason and the spiritual faculty are clearly declared the invisible things of the Eternal Mind. The heavens above have their lessons, of infinitude and sublimity to the common observer, of order and eternal law to instructed thought. The earth beneath is heaved up, and lo ! the history of Providence stereotyped in the rocks, as with the letters of a printed book ! Experiment, to use Lord Bacon's image, unsatisfied with its spontaneous evidence, puts Nature to the torture, and wrests her secrets with the scrutiny of an inquisitor ; and the most advanced are the most convinced that, in Newton's memorable words,

we are still but as children gathering shells and pebbles on the shore, with the ocean of Truth unexplored before us.

Now when we speak of Nature witnessing more fully to God from age to age, it is not meant that, sensibly to us, Nature varies: the change is in the receiving mind: the book is the same, the interpreter is different. The same page is before us, but a new light has fallen on the letters, a severer effort of thought is collecting their meaning. The same influences are breathing from its face, the same spirit moving on the waters, but a more genial eye, a more filial soul, has caught their import. The same secrecy, the same reserve and silence, are over the external world; there is no voice nor sound; but the symbol is understood, and the spiritual God displays Himself to His children, clothed in garments of light, in His presence-chamber of the universe. It is in this way that Nature has the character of universality: *she* gives to all whatever they can take; and no man's power of taking lessens her power of giving. Now with God in Christ we have the same method of instruction as with God in Nature. The greatest truths are rather communicated to spiritual apprehension, as seeds of future growths, through kindling faith, affection and thought, than expressly stated. Christ has given us no definition of what Christianity is, for how define in words what is embraced only in a life which has no limit but God? The



works and life of Christ are in truth as illuminated facts, true to experience but anticipatory of progress, foreshowing our goal to make clear our destination and be a stimulus on the way—indications of things to come, not mere emblems and symbols as in the universe, but witnesses *in kind*. They serve to show us the Father through the only spiritual medium we know, the soul of a man. “The Son can do nothing of himself; but whatsoever he seeth the Father do, these things doeth the Son likewise.” And a man worthy to be a Son of God is a more unanswerable declaration of heavenly life, of human immortality, than material or sensible evidences could possibly be—than a voice penetrating the cold ear of death—than Lazarus and the widow’s son showing some of the re-unions of heaven upon this side the grave, or attesting angels and a visible ascension to the skies. The only thought that has ever stood in the way of a universal faith in immortality, is the fear, derived from ourselves, that human nature is unworthy of an eternal union with God, and Christ has taken that fear away. In *him*, in the embodied Truth, in the Word made flesh—*there* is the lesson as soon as you can read it, the motive as soon as you can appreciate it, the key of the spiritual mysteries as soon as you feel them to be mysteries, the heaven of reconciliation with God through love and the work of love, self-sacrifice, as soon as you hunger and thirst for its peace.

II. In consistency with this character of universality, providing for all the utmost they can take, there is no attempt in the Gospels to define the amount of truth which spiritual man may collect from the living manifestations of God. Our Lord never thought of measuring the light which his own spirit may convey into a kindred soul. A WORD of God we have, a living and incarnate Word ; but *words* of God we have none. Any revelations that words could convey must be of limited and definite things. If Christianity was of this order, it would be no blessing to our spiritual nature. It might speak of immortality ; but if it laid no quickening hand upon the inner springs of life, where would be its evidences of heavenly power ? An oracle of Truth set up to deliver responses on all spiritual questions would be death to the priesthood of the soul, an extinguisher of the oracle within, of the Light that lighteth every man who cometh into the world. Revelation—notwithstanding what great logicians tell us, who take their religion not from the receiving soul but from the analyzing intellect—is no mere regulative guidance, directing us how to steer our way through life and death to the presence of a God whose nature we do not know and whose morality we do not share ; neither is it a certain measured portion cut out of the immensity of Truth and communicable in words : it is the organic union of the branches with the Vine, the

fellowship of God's children, exhibited in one of them, with the Source of spiritual truth and life.

III. For the Morality of Christ has the same universal and inexhaustible character. If you would learn Christian Duty, no man can teach it to you by systematic instruction ; you must go to Jesus Christ—not to his words only, as to the Ten Commandments, but to himself ; you must be of his spirit, and receive its intimations of what Christ would do if he stood where you stand now. There is in Christianity no more of definite legislation about Life than there is of definite teaching about Truth. Its worship is a sense of God, a child's devotion and obedience to a Father ; and whatever prayers that faith inspires, whatever endeavours it sustains, whatever desires it reduces into harmony with the Will of God, these make the piety of a Christian. Its morality is a *spiritual* service, a sense, ever growing, of what is due to those who, through a common fellowship with God, are in everlasting fellowship *with us*. These are the springs of all piety and of all goodness ; and whatever sacrifice and sympathy, whatever surrender of perishable ease and indulgence to the spirit of reality and mercy, whatever fruits of toil and patience, of submission and of forgivingness, of aspiration and humility, these inward bonds with God and our brother may require from us, in this world or in any world, these we acknowledge as the implicit duties

of a Christian man. At present only with faltering steps, in some feeble and broken way, are we even aiming or striving to keep the law of the spirit of life, to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and all our mind, and all our soul, and all our strength, and our brother as ourselves. The time may come, if we are but simple and true, adopting more and more of Christ's standard as it becomes the genuine reach of our souls, the genuine expression of our own goodwill, when to us too to resist not evil, to give our cheek to the smiter, to go two miles with him who would constrain us to go one, to love our enemies, to do good to those who hate us, will be felt to be no more than the natural conduct of those who have God for their Father—only the natural life of the children of Him who, noticing no insult to Himself, outwardly avenging no wrong we do to Him, no ingratitude we display, no service we withhold, is true to His own goodness without distinction of persons, causing His sun to shine on the evil and the good, and sending His rain on the just and on the unjust.

If it had been told us by what details of action we were to serve God—if authoritative guidance was so full that the inward prompting never was required and so never at a fault—then there could be no life in ourselves; and though we might perform *moralities* as a servant obeys orders, we could never become the children of our Father's Spirit.

IV. And the sanctions of Christian Morality are of the same universal order. It claims no right over the human soul except through the constitution God has given us, the law of Perfection in us. The characteristics of a member of the kingdom of God are set forth under the form of Beatitudes, of the spiritual consummations of our own being. Its rewards are *in kind*, in the kingdom of heaven within, in mercy to the merciful, in peace to the peace-makers, in a vision of God to the pure, in the consolations of the Heavenly Comforter to those who comfort sorrows that are not their own. These are the grounds on which we claim for Christian Morality a universal character; for who will presume to measure the forms of piety which a knowledge of God as really our Father may inspire—what virtues of endurance, what submission in disappointments and privations, what conquests of soul over sense, of duty over pain, what rapt blessedness of humility looking ever upwards, a filial spirit, a faith like Christ's, may generate? Who will presume to define what sublime aspects brotherly love may assume, what burdens it may take upon itself, what enterprizes it may attempt, to what depths of guilt and suffering it may carry the knowledge of Him whom to know is life and peace? And who will presume to determine the blessedness of such a service, what communications of Himself God may make to those who purely love Him, or to limit the joy of a soul that has

once learned to know that it is more blessed to give than to receive? This is Christian Morality; these are Christian sanctions. Having no natural limit but God, are they not fitted for universal man, in all variety of circumstance, and at any stage of his everlasting progress?

V. The outward forms of Christianity present no exception to this universality: it has no rigid authoritative ritual, but finds a vehicle and a passage for its spirit in whatever mode of worship is natural to each nation or each sect. The glory it reveals is only faintly emblemed in the vast cathedral, and can make the humblest house of prayer the presence-chamber of the Almighty. The Eastern and the Western Churches, Romanism and Protestantism, Prelacy and Puritanism, Symbolism and Quakerism, find no word of authority condemning the peculiar taste of each; they are all right in that which they affirm, and they are all wrong in that which they deny. Whatever institutions it has originated are in subservience to a spiritual purpose; and when the purpose is provided for without them, the Christian is not bound. Our Lord's principle holds universally of religious institutions: that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. Its instrumental aids, its ordinances as they are called, its sanctuary services, its professional servants, all but its prophets, and these are not official persons, are ready to pass away the moment it can be shown, or in his


own case by any earnest man it is devoutly thought, that the health of his soul, his progress in the Christian life, is independent of their help. God forbid we should be so little of Christ's freemen as to recognize in these—in Sabbaths, Priests, Ministers or Sacraments—anything permanent, anything essential! We know nothing in the Gospel of this nature except its power to minister to the growing life of the soul, to draw us to God our Father, to destroy selfish desires, to make us holy and merciful like Christ; and if we live to the Spirit, we are no longer under the Law. Here, again, Christianity appears in its universal character, saying of every man who has life in himself, "Loose him and let him go," but compelling no man to walk alone who needs the sympathy and shelter of a Church; with forms and helps for those who require them, but laying no yoke or burden upon those who find them impediments, not aids, to their inward life. In all such things we must have entire respect for individual liberty, sincerity and truth: nothing can be more unspiritual, a more direct heresy against Christ, than to estimate the communion of a man's soul with God by his observance of modes and times of worship that seem natural to us. Luther, in the temper of generous extravagance which marked him, told his followers to make Sunday a day of conspicuous recreations, a noisy holiday, in protest against any attempt to force it upon them as a Divine ordinance. The

kingdom of God is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. If these are present, who will say that anything is wanting? "Who may refuse," said the Apostle, "to baptize with water those whom the Holy Spirit has baptized?" or what would it matter if they did refuse?

VI. And so it is in Christ himself that naturally the universality of his religion most conspicuously appears. There is no limiting mark of place or time or family upon him. Even when retaining the local accidents of language, he sets aside whatever does not belong to eternal life and universal man. He is a free spirit in communion with God's Spirit, taking the help of all the past, but not bound by it. The Law does not limit him: he came to fulfil it by giving its spirit wider applications. The Temple does not awe him; God is a Spirit: it was profaned by traffic, and unbrotherly exclusion, and unspiritual sacrifice; and only when it disappeared would men learn to look within and find the indwelling God: destroy it, and the true Temple, the sanctuary of the Soul, remains. The Son of Man—in equal relations to all, of peculiar relations to none—is of no country, of no descent, of no form of worship. It was the goodness of a Samaritan, it was the religious faith of a Gentile, that he praised, as beyond anything that Israel could show. His own nation rejected him because he moved free of their traditional ways. Compare him with the greatest of his followers.

He would not have reasoned like St. Paul. Catholic in spirit as was the Apostle of the Gentiles, it is impossible to conceive Christ using arguments derived so much from what is technical, or that need so much of special interpretation. He would not have given the partial view of the Fourth Gospel, spiritual as that is: we need the other three to furnish the divine humanity of Christ. He understood the Baptist, but was not understood of him. To the message of impatience, "Art thou he that should come, or must we look for another?" he could send an answer that declared the nature of the kingdom that could not be forced, and in the same breath gave full honour to the offended Prophet who had done his own special work so well. He understood every man's limitation, as not wrong in itself, but as only a part of the true fulness. It is this that makes him the universal Saviour, understanding every one, and presenting no dark side himself. Those deep-lying inspirations, affections and principles, the witnesses of God in us, which in others are wrapped up among accidental associations, partial feelings, national habits, inherited prejudices, and distorting personal inclinations, were *in him* the whole of his being. It is this which makes his character a natural one to nations most dissimilar in everything else. The spirit of Christ is independent of geographical relations. Its first progress was in the Oriental world, where no habit of life, hardly a daily thought or occu-

pation, was the same as ours; and it has moved Westwards ever since, showing that man as man is essentially one, and that race is nothing but an enriching diversity. The Love which is naturally born of our human affections—the inward Law which no conscience has failed at some time to proclaim—the sense of Him from whose Spirit who can flee?—Heart, Mind, Soul, Will, working all together, and carried, by God's great help, into life—make the natural magic which has drawn all men unto him. The guilty did not shun him. They feared no insult of rebuke from guileless Purity. A holy mind can awaken in a sinful heart the most absolute repentance, but not the burning heats of shame; for real penitence knows no limits to its voluntary humiliation, and shame partakes too much of impotent self-defence and galled pride for the utter sorrow of the contrite. He of whom it is not on record that he ever uttered a severe word except against pretence, hypocrisy of heart, was the great Physician of souls, whom Pharisees thought to injure by the testimony that sinners followed him. The *Mourner* is very near to "the Man of Sorrows," for we are all sharers in the discipline that formed the Son of God. The *Saint* lives upon "the imitation of Christ." What more can Faith demand? What nearer fellowship with Heaven can man on earth desire? Whatever criticism may do with man's report of these things—and let it freely do its



best, for only good can come out of the truth—nothing now can disturb the spiritual fact that God has revealed *His Son in us*, and that the life that we live, earthwards and heavenwards, we live by the faith of the Son of God.

And it is upon this deep unity that our Lord rests the real evidence that God had sent him to be a Saviour, a Leader and Reconciler of men. "I pray that all may be one ; as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us : that the world may believe that Thou hast sent me." This surely is a religion that cannot be outgrown. This, as we read it, is Christianity ; and blessed shall those disciples be, of whom the Son of Man shall have no more cause to be ashamed in the presence of his Father, than they have cause to be ashamed of him and of his words before the face of men.

III.

Aptitudes for Discipleship.


JOHN i. 48:

“Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me?”

WHAT are the dispositions of heart which would attract to him who possessed them Christ's most hopeful regards? What the natural elements that furnish the happiest aptitudes for discipleship; the cast and frame of spirit that is the peculiar seed-bed of the Christian graces?

Prior to experience, we might have greatly erred in forecasting the make of mind on which Christ would look with expectation. If without the Gospel notices of his elective affinities we had conjectured an ideal disciple, we should probably have made a consistent strictness more prominent than sensibility; chosen passionless bosoms for our Lord's head to rest upon, and living stones all of one pattern to build the glory of his Church.

But those who drew to themselves the expectations of Christ, as most likely to reward the travail of his soul, were of a different type. Peter's impulsive readi-



ness, eager but self-ignorant ; ever generously moved, though ever unequal to the movement ; his heart rushing into trials for which his soul had not prepared him ; springing to meet his Lord on every stormy water, and sinking in panic reaction when the peril and the terror were close upon him :—St. John's sensitive affection, of the feminine type, not free from its natural admixture of over-jealous vehemence ; desiring for himself the place upon his Lord's breast, and fire from heaven on his foes :—Mary, who sat at his feet, with uplifted eyes, drinking in the spirit of eternal life, whilst the work of the passing hour fell unheeded from her hands :—Martha, eager to do him fitting honour, though detained for the moment by the homely cares of love from the Mount of Meditation :—Zaccheus, struggling between spiritual desires and an ungenial occupation :—the Woman who had sinned but was forgiven because she mourned and loved much :—the Youth in the innocent flush of freedom from transgression within his small sphere of duties, whom our Lord, beholding, loved for his ingenuous boast of all known tasks performed, and for his ingenuous, though ineffectual, sorrow when the boast proved vain ; retiring from his self-assertion when the testing word found out the weak place in his soul :—these are some of the instances in Gospel story which show the affinities of Christ, what susceptibilities of spirit he deemed most open to God and reality, most receptive of the seeds of good-

ness, most likely to repay a heavenly culture with the richest returns, though for the time only native wild flowers were in possession of the soil.


In determining from such hints the congenial rudiments of character for the action of Christ, it is clear that we must drop whatever does not touch the sensibilities of heart and soul, whatever does not enter into the natural qualifications for one or other of the Beatitudes. Intellect, genius, sagacity, power over men and things, capacity for affairs, recede from our view. These are great qualities which a member of the kingdom of heaven may splendidly use in its service if he possesses them, but they will not make him a member of that kingdom. They reach their purest glory when they enter and serve therein, but they do not themselves open the door. The powerful instruments which a man's natural gifts place at the command of his will, do not determine the spirit that directs them, or the cause to which they give their strength. The "understanding heart," the moral affections, the soul's hunger and thirst for love, for beauty and for righteousness, with the thrill of its inward response to all goodness,—these draw to their service every other part of our nature, as instruments by which the spirit works its will, or as interpreters to the soul upon its watch of the possibilities of life, of the opportunities of God. The vital question is, Has the love of God reached the will? or, Is it only a lambent glow on occasional

affections? If the first, it is for ever reaching forth to fresh conquests and endeavours in the directions of its natural service. No one who loves God with mind, and heart, and soul, and strength, could be content to live in ignorance of the order of God's thoughts, of the laws by which He works, and according to which all effective work must in God's world be done. "Whatsoever the Son seeth the Father do, these things doeth the Son likewise:" that is the test of a filial love which extends to the whole field of divine co-operation, and makes all knowledge and all power handmaids of Religion. No one, with a love born of God, could mourn over the evil and the sorrow that are in the world, and sigh for the coming of the kingdom of heaven, yet be indifferent as to his own possession of the piercing insight, the glorious vigour, the endowments for destruction or persuasion, the full armour, with which in the great emblematic picture the Archangel rushes as on the wings of light against the Prince of Darkness. A genuine love of God, and of what is dear to God, will enlist the whole nature, mental, emotional, instrumental; but there is no corresponding security that intellectual strength and joy will awaken the soul's thirst for the living water, or open a man's heart to receive in spiritual graces the imprint of the life of God. One glance at Nathanael, one glance at Peter, discovered to our Lord their natural fitness for discipleship; though the one had just scornfully asked,

"Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" and the other, until re-cast in the moulds of Christ, was more entitled to his name as "a rock of offence" than as a foundation-stone.

In looking, then, for the genial soil of the Gospel, we expect to find it in no rigid types—in no hard natures, without life from within to break surface shape and polish—in no frigid consistency fixed so soon and fast because the elements that compose it are so scanty, and fresh impulses that would disturb its small completeness are not encouraged; but rather in the receptive heart surrendering readily to the movements of a life diviner than its own, delivered from the barrenness of minute self-scrutiny by floods of inspiration from the Fountain of being, and though ever as in an agony of unfulfilled desires, yet never in despair as to what it was, or what it is, or what it is to be, whilst the touch of heavenly power is still felt within it.


The first aptitude for affinity with Christ is the possession of a living soul, susceptible to the natural signs of goodness. An impressionable nature may depend on original organization, and an incalculable addition thus be made to power and personal responsibility; but it is not in that form that it is in strongest relations to the kingdom of heaven. What is born of the flesh is but flesh; only what is born of the spirit is spirit; and there is no strength of spirit where there is



no strength of will. Great natural sensibility is apt to become self-idolatrous; to attribute to itself its easy exaltations of thought, its ready splendours of feeling; to mistake for its own the visioned life to which through quick perception and kindling imagination it is vividly admitted; to confuse rapid apprehension with rooted being, and glide into the fatal readiness, complacent and æsthetic, which comprehends everything, and is nothing. The metallic liveliness which responds to every touch and echoes every sound, may come from, or conduce to, emptiness of spirit,—the vivacity of surface thought, daring to deal rhetorically or speculatively with all the aspects of life, supplying the zest and colour that satisfy for a time, and conceal while they satisfy shallowness of soul and poverty of being. I should greatly fear for any one who had a remarkable facility of spiritual utterance—not necessarily for his present sincerity, but for the depth of the soil. Moses and Isaiah pleaded with God that they could not speak; and all the words of Christ would scarce exceed the bounds of some modern sermons. To be familiar with the prominent aspects of holy things, to be master of the forms in which they address themselves to the common imagination, to know how to let the hands fall on the key-notes of emotion,—this may be wide apart from the hidden man of the heart, the inner experience, deep, awful, conflicting, half unveiled, half concealed, which he who has most of it

will least profess to understand, and of which whoever will speak, drawing his knowledge from himself, will assuredly do so with stammering lips, and with an effort more exhausting than physical toil. It is not the susceptibility which is a constitutional gift that is a sure inlet for Christ, but that of the serious heart, in awe of itself, in awe of God, desiring what is real. It is fed on silent communion, on the long gaze of the soul into the heart of Christ, as conscience puts anew the seal of obedience on the measure of grace given to it receiving more and more of the fulness of life, "grace upon grace."

The heart that has begun to hunger and thirst for the bread and the water of life, discerns by a divine instinct the nourishment it needs. It finds, as Christ found, universal parables of nature. The spiritual meaning comes forth from the natural emblem. Light streams through the veil. It sees "the beauty in the grass, the glory in the flower;" and if these are perishable, so much the more the intuitional inference of Christ has its emphasis, "If God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is and to-morrow is cast into the oven," with what garments of righteousness and light shall He clothe the children of His Spirit! Especially no sign of the divine meaning in our human relationships escapes a heart so opened. The intended becomes the real: through the earthly imperfection the heavenly form is seen. Parent, child, wedded



hearts,—in these, beneath the troubled surface of our poor infirmities, we behold what God is offering to us, what yet remains to be; and nothing then, nor sin, nor death, can take it from our faith. God has shown it to us; the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. Our spiritual life is all prophetic; and what is yet unfilled is the kingdom of heaven within us. Men of deep hearts know this in the failures of expression; their words and tones have unfathomable meanings.

And, pre-eminently, the sign of a living soul is its discernment of the spirit of God in others, speaking in their acts, disclosed in their unconscious personality, evidenced in their sensitive reserves, shining in their face when they know it not. We have the standard example of this spiritual discernment, the instance which shows us what it might be, in the testimony of Christ to Nathanael, and, in its lower degree, the witness of Nathanael to Christ. "Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile! Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wert under the fig-tree, I saw thee! Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel!" Do we suppose that there was nothing in the natural signs of spiritual being to justify the immediate confidence of Christ? "I saw thee, when thou wert under the fig-tree!" He


knew what there he had seen, when the inmost soul was revealing itself through the struggle of prayer in that Israelite indeed, who was intently wrestling with God at a moment when to him there was no eye in the universe but the All-seeing Eye on which his own was turned. Or, do we suppose that there was nothing in the words, and in the face, of Christ to command the instant and absolute confidence of Nathanael? "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God!" Nathanael knew what Christ had seen; and we must have stood in that presence, and seen the eye, and felt the tones of our Lord, and have had deep things in our hearts which that look conveyed to us were clearer to him than to ourselves, before we can reach the grounds of Nathanael's conviction, that before him was the discerner of spirits, the master of his soul, yea, the fulfilment of the secret things of God, and the Desire of the Nations. Whoever does not understand how this might be, and yet involve no more than spirit recognizing spirit, has everything to learn of the mightiest inlets of Faith.

The descriptive word by which our Lord characterized Nathanael, "an Israelite indeed,"—a striver with God, without guile,—a Jacob without Jacob's craft,—exhibits the kind of heart to be successful in that search, and most sure to recognize, and be recognized by, him who knew the Father, and had the light and peace of His spirit resting upon him. As was seen in

the historic type of religious selfishness whom our Lord named, it is possible to be a seeker after God in the spirit of self-seeking. There is a sense of God that makes a man sensitive about himself, and so carries the taint of spiritual guile. To be unoccupied about ourselves, about what God or man may think of us, if only we may find more and more of Him and of His light, in seeking or serving, is a rare measure of spiritual simplicity. We are not always absolutely sincere even in unbosoming ourselves to the All-searching Eye. Our very prayers are not free from unreality. We confess, and are not ashamed ; we adore, and are not awed, or bowed down, or rendered speechless. We say what we could not say if we were really speaking to God ; we tell Him of what He knows and we do not know ; we tell Him of what we are, instead of rising into His light ; we linger around ourselves, instead of going out of ourselves to meet Him and have Him acting upon us. Even our prayers are from our own level ; and dwelling on our own states, occupied with self-regards, do not acquaint us with God. We try to use suitable language to a God who is outside of us, and are not transfigured by His presence within us. But we are changed into the same image by looking on the glory that is in God's face, not by brooding over the shadows that are on ourselves. We best learn our blindness when it is passing away in fresh light given us by Him. We best learn our weak-

ness when we fall in His service ; our falls are then divine teachings and steps of progress. Self-knowledge is self-deliverance when it comes to one who is living for God. No one is so little oppressed with the care of his own reputation ; he is otherwise occupied. He unveils himself, unconsciously, in the self-forgetfulness of a great pursuit. No sensitive reserves, false shame, or fear of failure, hold him back from service. He has no disguises, for he has no side ends. Even if, like Peter, he is weak and presumptuous, it is shown in right endeavours, in enterprizes beyond his strength to which his strength will grow. And if, like Nathanael, he shrinks alarmed, with offended pride, at a word of undue praise—"How knowest thou me?"—he yields at once, like Nathanael, to a spiritual presence that meets and transcends his own.

The most genuine sign of a religious sensibility which passes into the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, is the compassionate heart which cannot separate the sense of Fatherhood from the affections and the obligations of Brotherhood. The fellowship of love is conscientious, and with the joy takes up the duties, the burden and the cross, of its divine relationship. It rejoices with those who rejoice, and weeps with those who weep. It is pained by human suffering, as though the blow was on our own breast ; troubled by misery's dark despair, as though the shadow was on our own soul ; stricken and moved by the evil that is



in the world, as though the responsibility was all with us, and ours the place of charge in our Father's house of that compassionate Brother who would bear every man's sins and carry every man's sorrows. To the love which draws towards Christ, inspiring the conscience and the will, nothing is too great, nothing is too small. In the simplicity of service it makes the Beatitudes its own, having the blessing that is on the merciful, on the peace-maker, on the pure in heart and the meek in spirit, on the mourning for woes that are not our own, on the hunger and thirst for the inexhaustible things of God.

For it was not without deep significance that Christ pronounced on the seeker after God in whom was no self-seeking, the blessing offered to the first Israel in the vision of the night, and lost through guile : " Thou shalt see the heavens opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." For is not such a heart the place where the communications of earth and heaven are carried on, whence the prayer and the sigh go up, to which angels of grace come down? Is not all life, to such a heart, as the ladder set up on earth, reaching unto heaven, with the divine messengers passing to and fro, and the Lord God standing above it? Is not, to such a heart, every suggestion of love a whisper from the Mercy-seat, every prompting of conscience a mandate from the Holy Spirit? And whether to any one life here is for

few or for many days, whether the ladder of ascent is long visible from this its lower side, or early taken up and lost to sight, what is that to him or us, if only whilst still it rests upon the earth the heavenly messengers come and go! If only at every overture from God we close with Him at once, not making terms, like Jacob, but leaving all with Him, like Christ,—if only as each angel in succession presents his hand he has his hand accepted, to lead us where they point,—the angel of the divine Benignity, who spreads our table, and, filling our cup with the water of life, our heart with the wine of love, invites natural thankfulness to rise upwards into spiritual trust,—the angels of Chastening, who baptize with the Holy Spirit and with cleansing fire,—the angels of Faith and Hope,—the angel of Charity, ever nearest to the throne of God,—if these are honoured and entertained, as one would entertain angels, not unawares, then what matters it from what step of the ascent—whether when age is laden with all the spoils of earth, or with young eyes yet glistening in their first wonder—the last angel, whose face towards earth is the face of Death, but turned heavenwards burns with immortal life, bears us within the veil, to the kindred of our spirit within our Father's house!

IV.

Grounds of Trust in God.



MARK iv. 39, 40:

“And he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? How is it that ye have no faith?”

IN our human relations, to withhold confidence where confidence has been deserved, is justly held to be one of the surest signs of an ignoble temper. Now how far, according to this rule, are we honourably bound to have trust in God? How far are our relations to Him analogous to human relations, so that distrust, want of faith, is of that kind which in regard to a fellow-man would, with all generous natures, reflect deep discredit upon ourselves? For this is the ultimate ground of appeal. Religion is a personal relation—the relation of person to Person. It is not simply a state of human character; that is Morality: it is our whole inward and outward life, as that life is sustained, coloured and inspired by our personal relations with God. Whatever secret strength would pass away from us, whatever hues of rich colour would be taken out of our existence, whatever hopes would have

no support, if God was nothing to us, and we were simply left alone with our own nature—all that belongs to Religion. Without Religion we might have all that Philosophy, all that a noble or prudential Morality, all that Knowledge, can bestow ; we should lose all that depends on Faith. For Religion carries us quite beyond isolated human nature and its laws : it gives us a Heavenly Arm to lean on, an infinite Life to draw from : it is reliance in regard to all that is yet unknown legitimately growing out of our own experiences. Faith is no arbitrary demand that God makes on man : He establishes His claim upon it, before He asks it from us.

Faith, however different in its nature from logical certainty, has yet its own sufficient evidence, and in sensibility to this evidence mainly consists spiritual discernment as distinguished from intellectual clearness. Christ could not reasonably have looked for undisturbed hearts in the disciples when the storm was raging and the ship was sinking, unless he had previously given them grounds of trust, which ought to have carried the conviction that he was in God's keeping until his destinies were fulfilled, that Messiah's mission could not be accomplished by his perishing there in the Lake of Galilee. Their profession of discipleship *implied* so much, and gave him a right to complain of their "little faith" in a moment of natural terror and alarm.

Now, has God made for Himself a clear right to

put this same question to us, as often as we doubt or tremble? "Why are ye so fearful, and how is it that ye have no faith?" Has He a claim upon our confidence? Is there enough of His love *known* to us, to win entire reliance on His goodness in those other ways of His which as yet are dark? What might He have done for His vineyard that He has not done? Short of explaining Himself to limited intelligence, which must be an impossibility, what has He left undone of a spiritual nature that might have kindled readier faith in the hearts of His children? If Christ could make this claim, what must be the claim of God, who claims Christ as only one of the manifestations of His love! With how much more force may the God of Nature and of Christ—who made the human heart, who conducts the discipline that strengthens and matures it, who sent a Son of Man to interpret and display on man its spirit and its meaning—put this question to His children, "Why are ye so fearful? How is it that ye have no faith?"

What, then, are the known facts of God's relations to us that ought to produce trust in regard to the yet uninterpreted cases? What are the certainties that ought to colour and determine our sentiments towards all that has not yet come to the light? What are the unmistakable signs of desire to bless, the proofs of character, of holy purpose, that ought to win confidence in regard to all those ways of God that have not yet

reached their issues? What are the manifest instances of *essential* goodness on which, when we doubt Him, He might rest His case, and ask, as with the tender reproach of a wounded Friend, "Why have ye no faith?"

The difficulty of showing, by a universal argument, God's claim upon the faith of men, is to know what level of human experience to assume as a just exhibition of the measure of His mercies to *all* mankind; lest we take it so high as to be open to the answer that we speak of mercies as common which some do not enjoy, or we make it so low, and so outward, as not to present a true account of God's personal relations to human nature. It is in fact a question of individual experience, and never can be presented in an *average* form. For in all such general balances we can look only at the external condition, which is no index to the measure in which God's Spirit has touched the individual heart. He may have wrought for His Spirit an access to faith through inward experiences of suffering which has not been opened to Him through the easy lives of the prosperous. Trial may quicken spiritual discernment; absence of worldly good may throw the heart upon the One Good; while fulness and pleasure go thoughtless on their way. We can never tell by looking at a man's outward condition what access God has found through it for the communications of His Spirit. It is not the lot, but God's

visitation to the heart in and through the lot, that makes the just measure of His claim upon individual trust ; and hence the difficulty of presenting that claim under any general expression.

We are all inclined to see God, not in our ordinary experience, but rather in something that He adds to it, or in something that He takes from it. Those to whom ease and comfort are things of course, are apt to lose the freshness of their thankfulness for these every-day mercies, and to grow far more sensitive to the occasional interruptions to their blessings than they are to the blessings themselves ; whilst those to whom hardship is their habitual condition, and peace and joy the exceptions, feel *these* to be the strongly marked moments in existence, sources of vivid thankfulness, salient points that remain in the memory of the heart. Even though with both we should suppose the ordinary state to be one of religious indifference, yet the exceptional experiences, which carry emotion with them, with the habitually prosperous may be felt only as interruptions to his peace, difficulties in fact against God's love ; whilst with the habitually suffering and hard-striving, the exceptional experiences are moments of ardent gratitude, perhaps of rapture and relief. The one may be led to complain only because the common course of his blessings is broken by an unwonted calamity, whilst the other is freshly awakened to God's goodness when his habitual hard-

ships are broken by an unlooked-for joy. The inequalities of external condition carry with them, therefore, no corresponding inequalities of sensibility to God ; and the true average of God's claim upon our faith is not found by balancing the outward fortunes of men, but by an attempt to estimate the degree in which God commends Himself to the individual heart, through whatever condition. How, then, does God make good a universal claim upon human faith ?

I. His own faithfulness in outward Nature, some page of which every man must daily read, is an open and enduring pledge of His equal faithfulness in spiritual things, that no intimation of intention to the human heart, no whisper of purposed good, kindling hope and partaking of the nature of a promise, shall fail of its accomplishment. The Psalmist *saw* this sign of God's truthfulness, His constancy to His word once spoken, wherever we can trace Him, guaranteeing His constancy where we cannot : " For ever, O Lord, Thy *word* is settled in heaven. Thy faithfulness is to all generations. Thou hast established the earth and it abideth. They continue this day according to Thine ordinances ; for all are Thy servants." The *constancy* of God where common observation or science can follow Him, is a sign of His character as the Teacher and Father of Spirits, which we do not sufficiently connect with the tenderness of His regard for man. For why does His power in any observed direction

confine itself to appointed tracks, and go forth only in one order? Why does He never in the same circumstances depart from the once established custom of His ways? Surely He is a God of Law, in our sense of Law, that is, of invariable sequences, only out of the wonderful condescension of His love. He imposes these uniform conditions on His own action only that man may be instructed—may learn, as in no other way he could, to partake and avail himself of God's wisdom and of God's power. These periodic successions of natural beauty, familiar, yet virtually infinite in variety, to us, do not exhaust the Almighty, are not perhaps peculiarly dear to Him. These laws and properties of matter, relied upon by us, are not necessary directions of His power. His will could change it all; yet nothing fails, nothing is fickle; He works as steadfastly as though He were the Servant of man, and not the free Lord of all things. An expectation created by Him never disappoints. Man's collected lesson is never turned mockingly into vanity. What was true once, remains true eternally. An observation of Nature wisely made to-day, serves the remotest ages. God keeps with us the compact of His works. And this is measureless goodness; it is an infinite condescension. A God who did not love us, who did not wish us to know and rely on Him, who did not seek to have a moral claim upon our confidence, would not thus sustain our faith; He would mock our labour and our

hopes ; He would turn our wisdom into folly ; what we had learned to-day, make untrue to-morrow ; lead us through painful processes, with eager expectations of like results, and fail us in the end. In this, His constancy to His ways, He has never shaken the faith of His children, though He has interpreted Himself by showing in Christ the spirit in man that should be inspired by His will and moulded by His rule. God neither mocks, nor is mocked. We may use or abuse His gifts : He remains faithful to the offered conditions. He does not disappoint hopes of His own raising ; He does not countenance capricious fickleness ; He does not avert natural consequences ; He holds us fast in *personal* bonds. His laws do not fail us ; His power does not succour us if we sin presumptuously. We must be true as He is true, our faith resting upon His faithfulness.

II. If we have this faith in God's faithfulness, then the personal relations He holds with us through the experiences He gives us, are not merely present states of man, they are acts of Divine promise, and His faithfulness in the natural world becomes voucher for those intimations of His ultimate love which these relations convey. Human life itself, with the faculties that accompany it, is surely a sufficient basis on which to rest God's claim upon the faith of men,—Man, as essentially he is, with a nature in harmony with the conditions amid which he is stationed—with intellect

to interpret—with power to subdue and use—with love to make himself a home—with imperishable affections to reveal the prophetic nature of that home, if he will only be true enough to ascribe the aspirations that are in him, not to himself, but to the Inspirer of his heart. God's goodness it is that has given us the power to doubt His goodness. The creatures that have no hopes are troubled with no doubts. It is the vision of bliss He has opened on our souls that enables us to ask, Does God mean to mock us? If we had no faculties to acquaint us with higher things, we should have no opportunity of distrusting Him who has brought these higher things so nigh to us. If the first race of men, as they stood on the yet unconquered earth, could have had the present condition of human life and adornment, our mastery over and enjoyment of the world, intimated to them in a way analogous to that in which a heavenly existence is now revealed to us, *their* utter unbelief would have been much more reasonable than our present feebleness of faith in the heavenly consummations. For God, meanwhile, has been educating man to great thoughts and to vast hopes, habituating him to rich possessions and to mighty conquests. He has led us on to the belief respecting ourselves, that with God all things are possible. Contemplate the first man placed upon this earth, left alone with the raw materials of nature, with its clay, its rocks, the things that lie buried in its

strata. Could a more hopeless enterprize be conceived? Look now to the face of our present civilization for the measure of unfolded gifts, of hidden greatness, that God had lodged within him. Conceive him in his helplessness looking out upon the ocean, dark, mysterious, sundering; he has crossed it by a path that no fowl knoweth, that the vulture's eye hath not seen. Picture him lifting blank eyes to the midnight heavens; he has reduced them to the most perfect of the sciences, interpreted their laws, and entered into the conceptions they give of the immensity of God's works and of the order of God's mind. And with these hints of permitted fellowship with the Author of Being, can he be justified in distrusting any pledge of yet unattained good which God has whispered to him?

III. But more individually: Is there not a secret assurance to every man of, I will not say the happiness that is open to him, but of something infinitely higher than happiness—of the *blessedness* that is open to him, the progress, the growth, the contentment of being, the resources for true life, simply in faithfulness to God and to his own spirit? Is not that sigh of every heart when it looks back upon life, and wishes it had the course to run again, that it might retrieve its errors and garner its possibilities, an acknowledgment of this? Let a man but recount his opportunities. He knows what he would be now, if every day

had been faithful, wise and trusting, as every day might have been ; what might now have been his knowledge or his works ; what a home he might have made for himself in the hearts of men ; what a harvest of blessings have laid up with God, when he rests from his labours and his works shall follow him. And does not every man feel that still he is free to take up the great work of Life and Growth, and to pursue it with the same certainty of success ? And is not this conviction of the very essence of faith, the most living proof of the goodness of God working in us that it may generate faith ?

IV. Connect all this with the claim which God makes upon our faith through the universal affections of our nature. There are few who have never felt how simple are the elements which in a right state of the desires would be sufficient for the blessedness of life—what sources of joy there are in a loving heart ; and there is no condition of human existence which God does not strive to irradiate with this prophetic light, no circumstances in which its presence would not more than compensate for mere adversity. And how diversified the forms in which this light from God appears even within the limits of a single family—in the lustrous eyes of childhood, in the confidingness of helplessness, in the fellowship of equals, in the unworldliness of age ! As we grow purer and wiser, simple natural affections more and more seem to be the wealth of

our life, the element of our immortality. All the other joys of life taken together do not amount to as much as this, the most diffused, the most accessible of them all, without some provision for which no human being can be born into the world. And even if cut off from its objects, or never given the full enjoyment of them, still in the most solitary heart may they reveal the possibilities of God, the depths of peace that lie within the pure desires of human nature. For it would be a sad mistake to suppose that faith in the future can be built only on an experience of ripe happiness; it is built on our capacity of sympathy, and it is quite enough for this purpose if we can be made to feel that there are the seeds of blessing in us. Indeed, in the absence of mortal realizations, the sense of God as the Father of Spirits, drawing to Himself the hearts of men, filling them with hopes, trusts, and craving affections, may be more immediate evidence of His goodness than any possible amount of temporal satisfaction. Yet this cannot be weighed or numbered; it cannot be submitted to general examination in proof of Heavenly love, and as one of the feeders of faith. Who knows the secret rapture, the silent prayer, the loving contemplation, the devout patience, the unasking contentment in toil and hardship, the ungrudging heart of the desolate, in witnessing, or furthering, joys they cannot share! These, the highest manifestations of God's presence with us, are known only to the indivi-

dual, and are necessarily overlooked when we collect our proofs of His claims upon our faith from off the outside fields of visible life. Yet at what heart has He not sought an entrance for these feelings? To whom has He not given these pledges? To whom have they not come and shown His intent to bless, though we have not yet received the blessing?

But God's love is not always clear: No; else should we walk by sight, not by faith; and what we now call Religion could have no place in a world where God never appealed to *the trusts* of the soul. For no one will maintain that a religious heart is shown in acknowledging mercies which cannot be denied, which are so real and so present that they may be touched and counted. These, with the quickenings of God in our own hearts about which we cannot be mistaken, are the positive certainties which become the justifying ground of boundless faith,—that margin of experience from which we collect the evidence of His goodness, the grateful memories of His love, that make us trust the Infinite Unknown. And the true piety begins, or rather it begins to be tested, to have its spirit tried, of what sort it is, when we cannot walk any more by sight. It would be no proof of the faithfulness of human friendship to acknowledge open offices of love where no ground of doubt could be found or trial of sentiment be shown. But if a friend, who had long given every evidence of stainless honour, of disinterested

goodness, of never awakening an expectation he did not satisfy, is suddenly shrouded in some mystery, then comes the time to test, not *him*, but us—to try the quality of friendship, and show what spirit we are of. But we treat God as no man would treat a friend, and expect to hold him. And in regard to God the injustice of distrust is aggravated by the impossibility of preventing clouds of mystery floating between the Infinite Intelligence and the frail spirits of us His creatures.

There *are* mysteries in God's providence, and there is a necessity that there should be mysteries ; but still the one question remains, "Are the known ways of God so full of goodness, that faith in Him for the yet unknown is a claim that He may justly make?" What are these mysteries? So far as they are of a moral nature, with which alone we are concerned, they arise from this—that all earthly experience is for the *education* of our souls, in kinship to God Himself ; in the notable words of Christ, that we may come to have life in ourselves. It was mystery that made possible the existence of such a being as Christ—the mystery that goodness should suffer—the mystery that the innocent should seem stricken of God and deserted—the mystery that the righteous should be delivered into the hands of the unrighteous, that power should wait upon sin, and the holy One of the Father have no place to lay his head. Remove such mysteries

and you remove the Cross, you remove the spiritual glory of Christ ; and human goodness, without a struggle, without a difficulty, without a temptation, could only be spontaneous movements following natural instincts ; that is, it could only be an animal development. We should become only as God's creatures who cannot disobey His will, and cease to be His children who give Him our hearts.

But, in fact, there are no more mysteries connected with the sufferings than there are with the blessings of life. Here is a man steeped in afflictions : if in this state the man glorifies God by his faith, by his patience, by his love, a great spiritual work is accomplished and the mystery disappears ; and every man exposed to sorrow, to what are called mysterious dispensations, has so far the power of illustrating God's providence, of drawing the veil from off the face of the Almighty. But suppose that no such spiritual fruit appears ; still the mystery is not greater than in the case of another who, surrounded by blessings, shows himself insensible to the claims of God upon him. There is at least as much mystery in godless prosperity as in godless suffering : the mystery, if it is right to call it such, is in the spiritual insensibility, and that will disappear when our Father's discipline has had its perfect work.

It is too easy for all of us to understand how men come to disobey God through sloth and passion ; but

it is not so easy to understand how we come to want consolation through distrust of His goodness, through doubt of His purpose to fulfil the promises of His Spirit in us. We can understand sin better than we can understand distrust, except so far as sin obliterates confidence in God. Temptation may kindle evil passion, and a great sorrow may for a time overflow the soul ; but on what grounds shall we explain a lasting want of faith in God's love, or in His great designs for us ? And the times are fast passing away in which any of us may yet have the filial privilege of showing our earthly confidence in God : when we enter within the veil we may see face to face. When Thomas laid his hands on the print of the nails, he had lost the blessedness of faith, of recognizing the Christ by his spiritual signs. And when God to our new-born eyes shall disclose all His ways of love, our first feeling may be the deep shame that we ever could have doubted,—as it may add a surpassing joy to heaven itself that whilst clouds and thick darkness were around Him we had never distrusted the purpose of His love.

Surely, it is the end of all discipline, of all mysteries, to give us this tried trust in God, to make us children of our Father with the love that casts out fear, so that here on earth we may come to dwell as in the temple of the Almighty's presence, listening for the whispers of the Comforter. Has God not given earnest enough, to trust Him for what remains to be fulfilled ? In

every moment of fresh insight, of shamed thankfulness for newly-discovered mercies, of mystery revealing holy purpose, of love raised from earth to heaven by sorrow and by death,—surely, we must put the question to ourselves, “How can we ever be fearful again, or suffer faith to fail?” As often as unexpected peace comes out of darkness, out of the agony of our souls in the times when the light of our life goes out and we grope alone for God, and the heart becomes more prophetic, memory more quickening than possession, and we know a quiet that passeth understanding, surely, our souls should be looking forwards, gathering strength to meet all terrible experiences that have been to others, and may be to us, necessary parts of our Father’s providence. How is it that we do not learn the open lesson of Christ’s life—amid what unlikely circumstances of trial, loneliness, anguish, and desertion, the best beloved of God may appear? It is not ours to have full insight into our Father’s ways; but how can we deny that we have pledges of His goodness which a child’s heart ought to accept, pledges which, in our most suffering or desolate moments, entitle God to ask, “Why are ye so fearful? How is it that ye have no faith?”

V.

The Goodness and the Severity of God.

ROMANS xi. 22 :

"Behold the goodness and the severity of God."

THE cases of difficulty in our moral life are those of conflicting or mutually qualifying feelings, when contrasted sentiments struggle together and modify each other, and adequate expression has to be given to them all. In an act of judgment upon the character of an historical event, or of a transaction within our own times, touching our bosoms and interests, it is easy to be engrossed by one impression—to take what is called a strong view of a subject, which generally means to mistake some single feature for the whole countenance of a deed—to regard with an unmixed feeling of sympathy or censure, as if it was a simple question of absolute right or absolute wrong, some most complicated interest in which, as in most things human, good and evil have blended together in mystic fellowship. Or, where the difficulty is not one of right judgment, but of the faithful and courageous, yet scrupulous, utterance of that judgment, when the mental act of

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discrimination has been performed, and what remains is to give legitimate effect to it; as, to take the simplest illustrations, when in private life the character of your friend has become a subject of anxiety and solicitude, and the difficulty is to give such expression of your tender regard as will convey also the expression of your highest moral sentiment; or when in political life the character of your party, of those you act with, along with much that you approve has become complicated with some impure element or mode of administration that you cannot approve, and the difficulty is, on the one hand, not to weaken what you deem a vital cause, and, on the other, not to stand pledged to anything from which your own loftiest honour secretly recoils;—in all such cases it is easy to be silent or to speak partially, but to give faithful, and at the same time judicious, expression to your *whole* state of mind, is perhaps the most delicate problem in practical morals. And there is, for the most part, very little respect due to what are called *decided* characters, men who can settle things in a summary manner,—in whose field of vision there are so few objects that what they do see stands out in absolute promineney, like a tower upon a plane,—who have no doubts because they are without the fineness and fulness of perception that give the materials of doubt,—whose force of impulse has an uncontrolled strength from the narrowness of their sympathies, and who, having once determined upon

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what *to them* seems good, can set themselves to beat down whatever stands in apparent opposition to it, with no discrimination and with no relentings. It would be painful, perhaps over-curious, to inquire how far the most conspicuous practical successes have been owing to this obtuseness of vision, to this hardness of purpose, which, open to no perception but one, touched by no sentiment but one, has swept into destruction whatever was associated with the interest it was seeking to destroy, leaving it no place to return and harbour in. In the work of Religious Reformation, for example, how much has the world lost, and lost for ever, of the sublimest efforts of man's genius, of his devotion to the eternal and the spiritual labouring to express in outward and adequate symbols his ideas of worship, only because those outward monuments of the invisible, vast, shadowy, undefined as the sentiment of Reverence itself—those mystic courts of Prayer that might have breathed to latest generations the inspirations of loftiest piety, giving a tone to the mind like strains of solemn music—had become associated with a superstition, and the ruthless hand of Reformation, instead of carefully separating and cleansing it away, with an impulse of fierce hate rather levelled with the dust the temples where it dwelt. Those losses are irrecoverable; for, in the first place, the descendants of such fell reformers are too apt to inherit their ungenial antipathies; and, in the second, it would appear that

only once in the history of a people can there be that predominance of Symbolism in the expression of religious ideas, that subjugation of all thoughts and interests by the spiritual element in an unarticulate form, through the mystic utterance of Art and Architecture, of which these were the products. Men strive to express through the forms of Art the aspirations and ideas which they cannot define in words ; but that is a stage in its religious life and manifestation which never occurs twice in a nation's history. Protestantism, with its defined theology and sharp verbal distinctions, has seldom built a cathedral, or originated or needed an architecture, of its own ; all the distinctive ideas it has it can express in words. Doubtless it would be a weakness of sentiment to deplore such losses, if God saw that the ancient superstition would return and nestle beneath its ancient altars so long as the altars stood, and even have power to seduce and assimilate to itself the purer worship ; but since God's acts of providence are, as it were, determined by the wisdom and strength of man, it may still be permitted us to deplore that man had not, and has not, that union of largeness, force and tenderness of nature, which, in the reformation or destruction of what is evil, makes it safe for him to preserve the beautiful or the solemn, with which it had become so intimately united as to seem part of its life and working.—You may spoil a man for a popular reformer by giving him too many

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sympathies; as you may spoil him for a popular orator by giving him too many perceptions.

The only description of *decided character* that is truly moral, is when, in the strength of equal and full justice to all the interests involved, we are enabled to resist a mere impulse; and when the impulse we do obey is not one of passionate purpose or of wilful sympathy, but the resultant of all the real forces, flowing out of the large wisdom, the wide thoughtfulness, the delicate and careful susceptibility, of a just and of a gentle nature. Not to work right onward with a blind unmodified energy, nor to pursue one object with an undivided gaze, is the test of the true decision of character; but to have your tempered judgment as firm and forcible as other men's unqualified passions,—in the largeness of your view to lose nothing of the concentration of your purpose,—to be as truly devoted *to all the interests* of a case, as earnest to do entire justice, as other men are to carry a single point, whose brain burns with only one desire, who have only a single impulse to work out. The man who acts only on a predominant feeling, though it be a good one, soon ceases to gain respect even for his goodness. He is considered as one carried away by his own nature, without wisdom or breadth of character, following his instincts, rather than as one capable of looking with a moral eye upon all the interests concerned, and if necessary of putting a restraint upon

himself in order to do what is right, *what is best*. In the Latin language—and all language is full of concentrated wisdom, as of poetry and logic—the same epithet expresses the outwardly contrasted but cognate qualities of weakness and of violence; for a man *is* at once weak and violent who is not the master of himself, who goes off on an impulse, whose conscience does not preside over and hold in hand all the forces of his nature.

This view of the tempered character of man, of the necessity *in him* for balanced and blended qualities, may prepare us for finding the same sort of union in the character of God, the same modified and restrained modes of action, the same absence of simple impulse, of pursuing a single end, or manifesting a single affection to the forgetfulness of others,—the perfect comprehension in Him of every interest, and the real harmony of such mutually qualifying frames as are brought by our text into apparent opposition: “Behold the *Goodness* and the *Severity* of God.” Why, for example, is there anything in the universe but clear, undeniable manifestations of God’s tenderness? Because the impulse that shrinks from giving pain does not express the whole of God’s character in relation to man: holiness, free-will, self-determination, must be developed in God’s children, if they are to be like Him, equally with mercy or trust in mercy, and in His sight who seeks to impart Himself belong to the fulness of His love.

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Even in those manifestations of God which are most declaratory of His Goodness, the outward aspect of Love clouds over, and His attributes of Severity break forth. There are in Nature revelations of Him who made it, and who must have impressed His own character upon it, with which it would seem impossible to connect any other sentiment than of the mercies of the creative Mind,—mornings, like the first freshness of the new created world,—evenings, on which the peace of a serener life might seem to have fallen already, were it not for golden vistas which clearly tell that we are still but in the outer court of God's glories,—scenes, as far as eye can reach, blending every variety of natural object into the unity of a picture, where the moral image impressed upon the soul is that of *celestial* Beauty and of *celestial* Love, and on the very air, if it is from God, so pure and kindling is its touch, floats the living spirit of His Goodness. Yet Nature, the same Nature, can wear the impress of the sternest and most terrific attributes. Nor is it necessary to instance the dread fastnesses, the bleak wastes, where nothing lives; the same spot will serve for illustration of the Goodness and of the Severity of God; and the landscape that to-day was rich with waving harvests, a living page like a gospel in the Book of Nature, may to-morrow lie broken down beneath pitiless elements, as if some omnipotent enemy to man was working an evil will, and in the

wailings of the blast listening for the cries of the famished.

We have the same manifestations of Goodness qualified, and no doubt completed, by Severity, in the moral scenery of our life, in the joys and the griefs of the Affections. There are elements of human blessedness sometimes brought together which only a God of Love could have moulded to each other with so fine an adaptation, and which, like the first happiness of Eden, it might well be supposed, as in primeval legend and poetry, that only an evil being could look upon with a purpose to destroy ; yet where does God manifest His Severity with so inflexible a will as when some blight of sin or death falls upon the bosom of families, and no tears, no pity for the desolation that is left, can win the victim from His hands—no supplications of the innocent save from retribution the one who has fallen into temptation, and who bears not his own burden, nor suffers alone, but by the ordination of God, and through their very participation in His holiness and His love, sends bitter pangs through the bosoms of the pure ? Everywhere does God make this two-fold revelation of Himself, demanding from all who trust in Him the spiritual elements of Faith and Patience, an aspiration after Holiness to which Love in all its forms is tributary, and rearing a Piety not fed by soft rains and sweet sunshine, but hardy enough to strike roots into the rock and struggle with the tempest.

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Select even our Civilization, which being the highest condition of man must be the highest collective expression of God's Goodness—at what an expense to humanity is it produced! how fearful the mass of hidden miseries, of dumb ignorance and fierce passions, that lies at its foundations! I mean not that these things are necessary, or that in any respect the former times are better than the present; but that at every stage of improvement, taking man as he is, God will consent that the needful price of human suffering shall be paid.

The Goodness of God, then—let us try spiritually to understand it—is a goodness that does not shrink from the infliction of suffering. It is a goodness that is not incompatible with the permission of pain even to the limits of human endurance. The influence of physical pain in the formation of spiritual character is one of the mysteries of God. He alone can measure the need or trace the working. God alone knows what in this respect any of us may require, or may yet be called either to suffer or to witness. And without shadowing our hearts with unfilial fear—for sufficient for the day is the evil thereof—we should yet be collecting something of the strength of preparation, through some forecasting of the soul, some occasional questioning of ourselves as to how we should endure what God, in the infinitude of that holy Love which will not shrink from any needful suffering, may have to ordain for us.

We can in no way make a plea for God's Goodness by attempting to deny the magnitude of human suffering. We can with no safety avert our eyes from the fact, that He can ordain and continue what if a man, with only a man's range of knowledge, could end and did not, he would be inhuman. He can contemplate exhausted nature in those moments of dread relief which the intensity of pain necessitates, and unmoved from His purpose re-issue the decree that renews its agonies. He can contemplate the broken heart of Penitence crushed to the earth in shame, and even from the returning spirit that He loves, forgives and blesses, remove not one pang, lift off not one sad consequence of evil, except the alienation of the heart. It is indeed in the first access of a full repentance that we are most sensible to the Mercy that takes us back, but also suffering most from a sense of the unworthiness that made us drop His Hand and wander in our own ways ; and in the same moment we are blessing the Goodness and trembling under the Severity of God. It is all-important to the healthy vigour of our piety, to the just expectations of the spiritual mind, that we should familiarize ourselves and others with the truth, that God's Goodness, and our faith in it, will enable us to endure suffering, but may not exempt us from it. Our reliance upon God's Goodness is not a reliance that we shall know no hours of agony—hours from which Christ prayed to be saved, and found that it was not

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possible. The only faith permitted to piety is that God afflicteth not willingly, that He has a purpose of surpassing Love which no weakness or leniency of nature prevents Him to work out, and in reference to which His Severity is the perfection of His Goodness, not the impulse, but the wisdom, of a Father's Mind.

Nor is it in the way of Retribution only, in permitting the consequences of every evil hour, whatever may intervene, to have their course, that we behold the Severity of God. We derive a new confidence in God's Mercy in our own case from the Cross of Christ; for what can we ask more than to be linked to the same lot, to be sharers in the same treatment as the Son of God? We learn this, then, from the life and death of him in whom the Father was well pleased, that suffering is not essentially penal, that in it our Father may be not punishing, but glorifying, moulding us, and by the same processes, after the likeness of Christ Jesus, who himself was made perfect by suffering. The purest spirit that God afflicts, the gentlest spirit that God exposes to an adverse world, will not compare its purity or its gentleness with the Son of God. Let us seek for *his* view of the *Severity* of his Father: "Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour! but for this cause came I *to this hour*. Father, glorify Thy name!" In that prayer lay the view of God's Providence which was afterwards worked out upon the cross. Can sufferings that lead

to such glory be counted anything but the afflictions that are but for a moment? and is the Severity that moulded the Son of God not Goodness also?

There are two opposite errors respecting God's character, and our connections with Him, according as the one or the other of these His attributes, His Goodness or His Holiness, is dropped from our view. There is the Calvinism, and its kindred creeds, that takes account of His Severity without taking equal account of His universal Goodness; and there is that description of general religion, of easy and languid sentiment, that is ready to cast everything upon His Goodness and to omit His Severity altogether. I know not a more presumptuous, a more unholy view of God, than this general trust in His placability, this loose reliance that we may draw to any extent upon His forgiving mercies,—not up to the measure in which we seek to be one with Him, but up to whatever measure we may need to be forgiven. This is the feeling of those who have cultivated no personal sense of God, no spiritual union with Him, but who make general acknowledgment of their sins and their shortcomings and their need of mercy, and would seem to have persuaded themselves that this loose confession of their need is all that is required to ensure them unmeasured grace and forgiveness. But forgiveness is not the remission of penalty, leaving the man what he was; it is the restoration of union with God. His mercy indeed is

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infinite ; but then it is the mercy of a holy God that embraces us, and not the unmoral compassions of a Being made in our own image. Dreadful is that perversion of the truth that man is made in God's image, which first obliterates *His* image in us through spiritual carelessness, and then supposes that HE is made in *ours*. The New Testament is, as its name imports, a covenant. It is not an offer of unconditional pardon, for pardon is reconciliation, and God is conditioned by Himself. "Draw nigh to me, and I will draw nigh to you, saith the Lord." Forgiveness is ever in the measure of the communion of spirit. Mercy is infinite and unconditional ; pardon is not. Your own will, your own sin, can say, No. The Prodigal could not prevent the Infinite Love following the lost sheep into the wilderness, or searching, though with the besom of affliction, for the spiritual gold recklessly cast away ; but the moment in which he came to himself, and said, "I will arise and go to my Father," depended upon changes within his own spirit. God will manifest His Goodness, not in *our* way, but in His way ; and the only Goodness that is consistent with absolute Love identifies Mercy with Holiness, and leads into His presence through the evangelical ways of repentance and newness of life. Indeed, when we consider it, God's goodness to men consists in qualifying them for the fullest blessedness of their nature, a nature made in His own image ; so that He shows mercy only by

bringing them into assimilation with Himself. He can send of His own joy through any spirit only in proportion as it is in harmony with His Will, or, as Christ expressed it, "*one with Him.*"

And even in our human relations, the idea of a tender and wise father conveys this union of Goodness and of Inflexibility. For certainly, to our conception of the perfectness of that character, the element of tenderness is not more necessary than the element of inviolable Authority, of supreme regard for the highest Good, and of an absolute adherence to what is Right. And God alone has all the tenderness, and nothing of the weakness, of a Father. With Him alone there is unmeasured Goodness, but no leniency, no mitigation of holy Law. Leniency, relaxation of Law, is ever a confession of weakness, of liability to err ; for it either implies something not right, not perfect, in the original requirement, or else an inability to enforce it through a defective sense of the supreme importance of following out the highest interests to the subjugation of all others. With God the inviolableness of Law is the bond of His Goodness ; for His laws being in themselves the highest expressions of His wisdom and His loving-kindness, not to execute but to relax them would show the absence of Mercy.

And not towards God only, but towards any moral being, there is no Love having in it the elements of stability that does not largely partake of the sentiment

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of Reverence, a reverence that knows there are certain things which will not be conceded. No character that cannot mingle Severity with its Goodness is capable of inspiring such a sentiment. In God our trust is perfect, because we know that His Goodness and His Sacredness are one, and can be crossed by no misleading affection. The sense of its unchangeableness is ever the dearest part of an affection ; but there is no human unchangeableness except in the permanence of moral qualities. And hence the elevation we are conscious of when we lift ourselves to the love of God, the serene peace which an affection at once so lofty and so secure breathes through the powers. And though human affections can never find in human objects a divine perfection, yet they may find a moral constancy, an abiding truthfulness and trustfulness of nature ; and then how many corroding fears are removed, and what a noble and devoted love may not imperfect, if they are only trustworthy, beings be fitted to sustain ! Let no one, though tempted on the tenderest side of his nature, depart in anything from the truth of his own being, from that in man which corresponds with the Severity of God. Pliancy, yielding, the easy moulding of one's own sense of Right to the inclinations of another, are the certain means to loosen the foundations of influence, to make light and unsubstantial the feeling of regard, to remove even the possibility of that moral rest and confidence for the heart, which is the mightiest

hold that one being can have upon another, the nobility and the strength of the affections. Even a child grows fretful and thankless beneath an uncertain rule, under the weak indulgence that cannot refuse nor restrain ; and so necessary is the sentiment of Reverence to the right working of every human heart, that childhood is not only better, but infinitely happier, under the steady government that yields nothing to the wilfulness of caprice, and makes it felt that the very tenderness which cannot be doubted is yet never administered in violation of a higher sentiment. And we all are children in reference to the One Supreme ; and we all have serener hearts because with Him there is no variableness nor shadow of turning, and that, knowing both the aims and the ways of His Goodness, we know also the Severity with which He adheres to them. And as a tender and wise parent lifts a happy child into companionship with himself, and makes, not relaxed duties, but shared interests, sympathy and fellowship, its sweetest reward,—so, in His dealings with each of us, Goodness and Severity are the personal appeals, the living methods, by which the Father of Spirits works the deepest word of His grace : “ Be ye holy, for I am holy : ” “ Be ye followers of God, even as dear children.”

VI.


Ours to work out what God works in us.

PHILIPPIANS ii. 12, 13:

“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling: for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of His own good pleasure.”

IT was the remark of a heathen moralist, that for the sake of life we lose the ends which make life worth living. In the throng of cares or pleasures, we let slip the central interest. In the variety or struggle of existence, time passes pleasantly or pressingly; and we think not of the “divine work” which the great Master-builder has appointed us to shape and finish here out of the materials given by Him. And this it is that exposes men to the wear and fret of circumstance, for it strips them of the sustaining thought that there is one grand and constant aim which they may for ever be working out with such means as God provides; and it leaves them without conscious guardianship of the sacred ark which they are to bear aloft in safety, to be beaten upon for no purpose by the mischance of the time and the wave of accident.

There are, it may be, some men so constituted that



for them it is less essential that the great aim of life should be consciously before them, to remind them of the work they have to do with the daily details of discipline: they turn naturally to the right course; they take intuitively the healthy view of circumstance; God's Spirit finds so little resistance in their nature that they take it for their own; their spontaneous affections are in unconscious harmony with the ulterior designs of His Providence; cast like others on the open sea of life, and subject to crossing winds and waves, without laborious study of the spiritual chart or painful shaping of their wills, they are found on the heavenward way. But these are the exceptions, and rather good than great, rather saints than heroes. Most men accomplish the "end for which they were born, the cause for which they came into the world," not by their spontaneous affections, but by the high strain of Conscience, by calling in the force of Principle and Will: God's Spirit strives with theirs: only through deliberate resolve do they choose the higher guidance: only through daily self-denial do they repress the encroachments of the lower nature: they have passions and self-love which would interrupt the calm flow of progressive life, and break its unity into aimless sloth, tumults and wanderings: their members are not by nature instruments of Righteousness: only, as our Lord said, by plucking out the right eye, by cutting off the right hand, can they prepare them-

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selves for God's service : when they feel the solicitings of the world and the hour, there is no unenforced security that they will draw it into the direction of the final goal : when they are crossed by circumstance, there is no spiritual instinct that will turn it to easy use, and make it contribute to shape the work of God. Such is the mass of men ; and for them it is essential that they keep constantly before the inward eye the great design of life, the one unchanging aim amid all the fleeting accidents—that, not trusting to spontaneous impulse or natural enterprize, on the warp appointed from above they should purposely work according to a pattern shown to them by God.

And what is this one aim in life to which all gifts, all opportunities, all times, all labours, have a common relation ? There is a *continuity* in our days, a purpose that runs through them all, not to be perfected, before the night comes, nor laid aside in our lightest hours—a scheme that we are not impatiently bent on finishing off, for we know that it will fill all existence. This great work, which continues by us in all vicissitude, and elevates us above the broken projects of the day and the hour, and draws something from every thread of life that but touches us and is gone, is the building up of ourselves after the great hopes and models that God has opened upon us. This is the business of life, the aim to be held aloft above thronging circumstance or imperious care, the temporary joy of the heart, or

the anguish of its discipline. These latter are but the tides in the affairs of men, the currents and the winds with which, favouring or adverse, purpose, faith and energy, fail not to make the port. The labour may be severer, the experiences more awful ; but no man who in anything has achieved victory ever wished that the contest had been easier, the prize less nobly won ; and who that escapes shipwreck regrets the sublime and terrible moments through which his soul has passed ? We would not tempt God by any presumption : we are not speaking of difficulties as desirable, but as *inevitable* : he who seeks or braves moral danger is certainly not the one who is prepared to meet it : it was in no such vaunting spirit that Christ contemplated the daily cross of duty ; nor could anything keep us from shrinking from before the face of moral pains and terrors, but the *religious* belief that the Framers of our being has determined for each the primary conditions within which he is to work out his own salvation—that whatever be the lot, within that lot a divine life is possible. God spoils no man's work—sets before no man an impossible problem ; but gives to each the positions in which a faithful spirit, not counting the cost, may achieve peace and glory. Christ entered on his life with a knowledge of its design—with its purpose before his soul : all outward things seemed counter to that purpose—nay, let it be remembered for the comfort of those who strive to sway others for their good

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and cannot sway them, that the history even of his own personal influence was a series of disappointments from which he endured pains severer than the bitterness of death : witness that dejection and lamentation over a people that repented not—witness the inaptitude and desertion of the Apostles in his last hours—from which he could release his soul only by escaping from such thoughts to take refuge with his God : sympathy in any sustaining sense, fellowship of spirit, kindred help on earth, for him, except with God, there was none : on the beloved disciple's breast he was alone with the Father : when he died, man saw but the shame of the death, and only God had regard unto the sacrifice : with a life that in its outward aspects seemed in the moment of his death at every point a failure, he alone, because he looked not to the verdict of his times, but to his eternal place in Providence, accomplished the end for which he was born, and lived the life of a Son of God. I said that there were those whose spontaneous spiritual affections seemed to carry them safely onwards without a hard struggle ; but *they* are never the men who aim at the highest things, or press towards the last mark. Who equally with Christ were ever moulded to take God's guidance for their own, and, whilst obeying nature, to be working out Divine Perfection ? Yet he had to strive for mastery, and in the "trouble of his soul" to summon before him the "cause for which he came to his hours" of trial, before he

could live for *Reality* alone, and make the power of circumstance, which, if yielded to, had marred God's purpose in him, the ministering servant of his glory. And shall we strive less against our weaker selves than Christ found necessary—shall we *trust* the spontaneous nature, the instinct, or inclination, or direction of circumstance, which, if he had not laid his hand in the hand of God, would not have availed to guide aright the course of Christ? If we are to sustain our souls by looking to the "*end for which we were born*," which the defeats and disappointments of the hour cannot destroy and may advance—which passing evil, loss and sorrow, cannot wrest from us, and may help us more nobly to secure—we must have clear before us our own conscious relation to this design of life, the *personal* work of man, the *part* that our own free-will and energy, our individual faith, hope, love and courage, have to perform in bringing the purpose of our spirit, of God in our spirit, to bear strongly on the circumstance of our lot. All that is outside of us—our life as men see it, or as men make it—and that natural type of constitution, physical and mental, which alone is our *fate*, though even *it* is largely in our power—these can vary the scene, or alter the conditions within which *our personal* work is to be done, but they can neither defeat it nor advance it; nothing can do this but the faithlessness or the fidelity of the soul to *the end* that God has set before us. All men in whose souls the

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Christian Ideal has a place—in whom, to use St. Paul's words, God has revealed His Son—have their work in life divinely given ; they are as artists possessed of a great conception, with faculties and materials for its execution ; and if only the Thought lives, the Image in the spirit takes form and body, the glory will be measured, not by the means and appliances, the workman's ample endowments and facilities, but rather by the degree in which the want of these was more than supplied by the love, force and purpose, of the *personal* power.

But it may be feared that this concentrated purpose of working out our own salvation is not the healthy way to that result ; that it may have in it something too much of self-regard ; that an habitual shaping of ourselves after a model, and a care for our own perfectness, may interfere with the freedom, the uncalculating self-sacrifice of a generous heart ; that by seeking our own salvation, even though we remember that salvation means the *wholeness* of our being, we may sink into spiritual selfishness, even such spiritual self-seeking as is not absent from the far-famed *Imitatio Christi*, a monkish transcript of our Lord ; that while *the Will* is laboriously doing this imitative work, the Affections, the spirit of Life, the creative springs of Good, may be insensibly weakened. It might be possible, indeed, in this way to reduce Christianity to an outward law, instead of what it really is, a standard *within the spirit*

itself, a divine affection working outwardly because it is genuine and must manifest its life. This refined danger, in order to obviate it, will require us to speak of a Christian *Life*, rather than of a Christian Character—of what we are to do for others and for God, rather than of what we are to make ourselves—of self-sacrifice and surrender, rather than of self-formation—of the brother's hand stretched out in help, rather than of the same hand kept at home and applied in artist fashion to ourselves. Men may be intensely selfish in educating themselves, may spend their whole spare time in self-improvement, and refuse to give an hour of it to enlighten others ; and though we might dismiss the objection by saying that such self-education is not the formation of a *Christian* character, yet if there are two ways of regarding the same thing, that which is the least likely to ally itself with limitation or perversion ought to be preferred, and the self-concentration that may attach to the idea of seeking our own perfection will find no encouragement in the constant purpose of leading on earth the life of Christ.

The Christian life may be regarded either as a frame of spirit to which we are to mould ourselves, undisturbed by the opposition of events, like Christ asleep amid the storm, or as a gracious *Will*, a loving and powerful Energy which is to go into intense action, to touch the outward strife of the world with transfiguring light, like Christ "going about doing good,"

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opening blind eyes, casting out evil spirits, cleansing the heart of penitence with its own tears. The sum of Christian Perfectness cannot be reduced under either of these views, and can only be embraced within them both—for self-discipline, self-control, self-correction, will be necessary even with a spirit full of all healthy and beneficent directions; but it is the last of them, that which places the Christian essence in benevolent energy and creative life, which is the most comprehensive of them both, of the power and of the peace of the divine mind of Christ, for there is no way so successful to keep the heart above the world as to give the life for its sake.

It is this view, that the aim of existence for every man is to have in himself the power of the Christian life, that reduces to unity the work and the mission of mankind, whatever be their circumstances, whatever be their individualities. There are many types of service and of excellence possible to man; but through all its forms the heart of Goodness ever is the same. Human character is indefinitely varied: not so the affections which good men manifest, the spirit in which good men act. These are few and simple, and for all the same. The few spiritual elements make an infinite variety of manifestation as they become blended with differing mental powers amid the diversified conditions which God appoints. For the conditions, mental or external—for our place, whether determined by our

capacity or by our opportunity, we may not be responsible ; but solely for the completeness with which in given circumstances the few spiritual principles perform their work. We could not even classify the forms of Christian character, the diversities of power and grace, that may result from all the possible combinations of differences of nature and differences of opportunity conscientiously used and served ; yet all spiritual life is in its essence one and the same thing ; to be children of God, working in His spirit, is the definition beyond which it cannot go ; and whatever be its sphere or its gifts, its form or its power, it can *be* no more, it can *do* no more, than is involved in having a filial trust in God, in having a brother's heart for man, in acting upon the principle of lending our strength to the weak, and of overcoming evil with good. A Christian life, under any conceivable conditions of mind and matter, is simply faithfulness to these few principles ; to work out our own salvation, is only to give life and body to these affections. The conditions are not of our framing, nor are the affections of our generating, for the Heavenly Spirit has inspired us with them ; but whether we will bring them to perfection or let them die—whether we will *personally* do our part—whether we will breathe the energy of Conscience into our instinctive love, and give an adequate life to the prompting in us of the Eternal Spirit—whether we will deny our own ease

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and conquer our own sloth when a divine suggestion enters our hearts that a brother should be helped—whether, when the witness to God's Love is only His still, small voice within us, whilst all without us is a thick, dark cloud of death or evil, our faith and affection will follow the inward or the outward pointing—whether we will put forth our free-will to serve the inspirations of the Almighty, or use our free-will against the inward movements of God—this has been left to us ; and it is the question of our Salvation. And it is a question that comes alike to every man : capacity, power and place, may vary the answer, but leave the question the same for each, as in the parable of the Talents one question was put to all—what account they had to give of what had been committed to them. Of what real significance are the differences that separate men, so long as those differences are not the fruits of sin ; or what the overwhelming importance of visible success in this view of the design of life ? The aim for which we give our best strength is everything, the visible success as nothing : true faith may be the greatest, goodness and fidelity at the highest, when visible success is at the least. If, indeed, you regard it as your mission, the sign that God is with you, to make all things straight in this world, to guide events to fortunate issues, to erect a kingdom of heaven by the happy ordering of circumstances, to have no failures in your attempts to serve your fellow-men, no

moral troubles in your homes, no sins in those who are under your influence,—there are many things that will not permit you to accomplish that design in life, and Christ himself was successful in none of these things. But what are the circumstances in which you cannot have faith in God—maintain a brother's heart for man—bear the burdens of the weak according to your strength—oppose good to evil, and so work out in God's way the destinies of a spirit whose meat and whose drink it is to do in these things the will of our Father which is in heaven? Station, gifts of mind, happy or unhappy conditions, are of no significance in relation to the question of a man's salvation. God tasks us all ; but *the nature* of the task, the place where He puts us, though providence with Him, is accident with us, and of no essential interest. Social differences between men—an outward distinction where there is no real distinction, or where the real distinction is just the reverse of what appears—where the higher qualities are in the subordinate place—where capacity and faculty are with the servant, and with the master inferior natural properties of mind and soul—these make opportunity for some of the most beautiful graces of the Christian character, for simplicity and humility, freedom from self-assertion, and true dignity, and so far are arrangements of God for the promotion of our spiritual education ; but the spiritual honour and the accidental honour may be found together, or may be

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found apart. Essentially it is the *same* glory that God provides for every man—co-operation with His Spirit according to our power and place—and the same spiritual effort to secure it He requires from all ; but the office, and the complication of events, amid which the forces of the soul dutifully maintain their tasked life, He largely keeps in His own hands. So far as God orders a man's lot and determines his natural powers, it is Divine appointment ; but to serve Him *where* He has placed us—and one place is just as essential as another, the foundation-stone which no man sees even more essential than the groined roof which draws all eyes,—to be true to the opportunities of our place,—to use and develope what is committed to us,—trustful, helpful, merciful, dutiful, overcoming evil with good,—that remains with the man himself, and is his Salvation.

I do not know that language is capable of assigning more accurately their respective parts to God and man in the joint work of our spiritual education, than is accomplished in the remarkable antithesis of St. Paul : “Work *out* your own salvation : God Himself works in you what you ought to will and what you ought to do.” The working *in us* is God's part ; the working *out* in word, act, thought and character, is ours. God puts into the heart the suggestions, the promptings, the aspirations, the commanding sense of Right, which point the way that He would have us to go. The inspi-

ration is our Father's: the holy desire, the merciful impulse, the fair vision of Good, proceed from His Spirit: what He asks from us is the energy to be fellow-workers with Him in these given directions for the sake of a fuller union with Himself; for, in the language of Christ's parable, "all that He has is ours." This is the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. The expression Holy Spirit is confined in the Scriptures to the personal communion of the living God with the conscious soul of man. That personal communion God is for ever seeking; but it is as true of our personal intercourse with God as it is of our intercourse with men, that one spirit has the power of veiling itself against another; and even God could not force Himself upon us without destroying the freedom and self-determination which make us spiritual beings. We can quench His Spirit if we will. The impulse that is long disregarded seems to retire from the heart, not because God ceases to be there, but because the heart becomes insensible. Let a man disturb his soul with wrong, with mean cares or selfish anger, and go forth amid Nature—its spiritual ministry is stopped; it gives him no peace, no enlargement, no sacredness; though the mountains, the skies, the air, and the presence of God in them, remain the same. He never leaves our nature without the witness of Himself; but we all know what dear human sollicitings, palpable to every sense, we can harden ourselves against, what imploring

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looks and words we can come to treat as if they did not exist. God seems to withdraw Himself from us more quickly than man does, for there is no sensible presence: we must watch for Him if we would hear Him: He speaks only to the listening soul. Selfish affections and relaxed wills can obscure the divine prompting of Love and Conscience. Their best inspirations men can call by some contemptuous name of visions and dreams, because they are not *willing* to realize them, because they will not lend to God the co-operation of their patience, prayer and struggle, to fulfil His Fatherly suggestion to us all of a life of gracious peace, of purity, of freedom from passion and corroding cares, of calm devotion to truth and goodness. From Him comes the unbidden prayer, the quick-shooting detestation of our sin, the sudden sense of sacredness in life, which the air of the common world again blows away. When a high aim, a merciful thought, breaks like instantaneous light, then God is *working in us*; and it is ours to work out the suggestion, "with fear and trembling" lest through delay or apathy we should lose the opportunity. Do we doubt whether such things are? What! Do we sit down and plan all our good impulses? Is it by an effort of our will that we summon into our minds every prompting of mercy, every aspiration after holiness? Does no Peace passing understanding whisper to us, "Be still and know that I am God"? Does no unsolicited direction gush up

from mysterious fountains, as unexpectedly as though God broke silence and audibly spoke to us? Life in any real sense is not concerned with man alone; it is man working together with God. The inward work of divine suggestion God performs; and if we are practically faithful, ere we have accomplished one good thought, one prompting of the Spirit, another and a higher dawns upon us. It is not Christ's teaching that we are only to be students and observers of *his* inspiration. God does not leave us to receive guidance and comfort at second-hand—to *hear* of Him, but never to feel Him. He works *in us*; and Christ's highest office is to show us the Father, to awaken a consciousness of the Holy Spirit in ourselves, that we may come to be one with God even as he was.

We are often told in these days that Christianity requires some new utterance to give it power, some development of undiscovered energy to make it equal to the world's salvation. It wants nothing but a faithful heart to take it up; it wants nothing but that man should do his part. If any man wills to do His Will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God. Are we to hear from easy men, or from the mere critics of religion, that Christianity is failing? Have any of its Cross-bearers told us so, the workers or the martyrs of any age? God send us the captive heart, the listening spirit, the obedient will, that we may work out the great salvation of knowing that a man's life consisteth

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not in the things that he possesseth ; that we too might live like God's children, and our Father be gracious to us as to him that dwelt in His bosom ; that faith, hope and charity, fail not from the earth ; and that the Comforter abideth for ever !

VII.

Knowing and Doing.

JOHN xiii. 17:

"If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them."

THERE is a vast body of spiritual truth which cannot be said to be known until it has been lived, consisting chiefly of the acquaintance with God inherent in those frames of our being which the Beatitudes authenticate. That the meek inherit the earth, without the cares of ownership enjoy it as their own and God's, walking amid its glories without disquieting ambition or lust of possession—that the pure in heart have an unsoiled mirror for God—that to the merciful it is impossible not to know that the Author of every gracious thought is merciful and gracious—that the peace-makers are in the spirit of their Father, feeling strife and confusion to be the abnegation of God—that a life of generous love and self-surrender removes morbid or visionary fears, and places us in a real harmony with the whole order of Providence,—these are truths of which we cannot say, "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them," but rather, "In

doing these things, ye know of the doctrine that it is of God."

Still, in regard to "these things," we may have sufficient experience of them to know them to be realities, and yet not have entered farther into their blessedness than to be made aware of the infinite depths of peace they open to one who would live entirely in them. There is a light of experience in the soul that opens the true way of life even to those who do not follow it. God gives to all some knowledge of goodness and of its spiritual joy, so that, if we do not pursue it, we put His grace aside and have no cloak for sin. All men have at least moments of meekness, of forbearance, of generosity, of sanctity of feeling, of hunger and thirst for righteousness, in which the Beatitudes stand confessed, so that by such brief yet commanding experience we become involved in the responsibilities of knowledge, and are left without excuse before God if it has not its perfect work. He gives to all enough of spiritual experience to show clearly the onward track of His will, the line of light and blessing running on into the infinite future ; and, having opened to us the Way, the Truth and the Life, leaves us, though never alone unless we will have it so, to the perils of our free-will, either to follow in the path He has marked, taking as from Him whatever meets us on that path, and not turning back, though where we looked only for blessings we suddenly find the cross in our hands,—or

else to lose that higher guidance by falling into the ways of the natural man—the man, not of inspiration, but of instinct, passion, wilfulness and ease—as St. Paul expresses it, “through unrighteousness suppressing the truth,” arresting the spring and flow of God’s Spirit in us.

There is another class of religious truths, of which it is possible to have an intellectual knowledge, which we can recognize without their first passing into the substance of our own spiritual experience. We learn them otherwise than by direct consciousness. Such are our intellectual convictions of an adequate Author of creation, a God who has impressed the order of His own Mind upon the universe, the manifest laws of His providence, His purpose in our being as declared in our moral constitution, with such assurance of immortality as may be grounded on what we discern of the attributes of God, on the aspects of this world requiring remoter issues for their justification, and on man’s inexhaustible capacity for progress. But whether we *know* by the irresistible presence of the Holy Spirit in us, as in all the great movements of conscience, or through intellectual convictions founded on reasonings whose authority binds the mind, in either case *Knowledge* will not make us blessed. The tree of Knowledge is not necessarily the tree of Life, nor always does it lend its sap to it. Knowledge is power, but only intellectual or instrumental power—a com-

mand over means, not a love for ends, nor always an impulse towards them ; and what *knowledge* does for us in all "these things" is simply to make us subjects for God's just judgments, to bring us under the action of His spiritual laws, so that righteously He may bless or righteously condemn. To "*know these things*" may be no more than that by an undeniable inward experience we have felt God's Hand setting us right on the way of life, and almost seen the paternal look that invited as if it would not be resisted, full at once of entreaty and of judgment, gentle, searching and holy ; but "*to do them*" remains with us after God has laid this responsibility upon us, and so opened our eyes that we can never again fold the cloak of ignorance against that piercing look, and escape judgment.

Now the evil is, that with all of us knowledge has a tendency to become a substitute for spiritual action and reality, and so deceives the conscience. We would become as gods from eating of the tree of Knowledge, instead of sons and servants on the daily bread of Life. That which we abundantly know, and never dream of denying, we not unnaturally suppose to have passed into our spiritual frame, into the very substance of our being. But, alas ! whatever we know, or think we know, we *are* only what we *have done*. It is not thought, it is not belief, that constitute the great realities of character, but the kind of spirit that breaks from us in speech and action—the temper, the will, the

love, that rule us, and the *work we do* in this world of God's, where the helpless and the helpful, the sorrowing and the sympathizing, the sinful and the holy, so contribute to shape and educate one another that we cannot say *which* become the greatest benefactors, the strong to the weak, or the weak to the strong. Now to this *living* energy which makes a man a real servant of the Almighty, a fellow-worker with God, a spiritual force co-operating with Providence, which gives him a power to wrestle with temptations and hold them under his feet, to soothe or share suffering, through the touch of human fellowship to renew heavenly hope in the weary and heavy-laden,—to this, all intellectual culture, all religious knowledge, may be totally external, as far removed as the enjoyment of a sublime fiction, even to the intoxication of delight, from a likeness to its hero. Of the mass of educated men, for example, to whom all knowledge is open, how many—how many proportionally, for the positive number is large and is growing—take a real part in that great warfare with evil in which man is daily vanquished and God is daily grieved—how many strive with another's sin as with their own mortal foe, enter into the thick of the strife and the suffering, and with their own hands lift the burden and beat back the tempter? This is a matter in which none of us can afford to cast the first stone. I am speaking of the reserve force of God, if only it could be moved to

come into active service—of those who are set apart from many forms of temptation, planted on high, instructed in wisdom, nurtured in pure homes, girt round with social fences which Shame itself in Virtue's absence would hardly dare to cross. When all these shall make it a part of *their own* business, as one day they will, to aid the spirit and power of God in the conscience of a weak or exposed brother, will the moral progress of society, will the cause of Christ, will the kingdom of heaven upon earth, look so feeble and far off as now it does? It is not that men are now wanting in benevolence, that they are unwilling to give or to suffer, but that, somehow, we have not yet learned the secret of contributing to the spiritual force of the world—that even when we are willing, we do not know how on behalf of another to enter into personal contest with his evil—that our conscience has not yet reached the point that, as often as God's purposes are baffled before our face, whilst we had a disposable power that we did not bring to His aid, we feel His defeat as though our own souls had been the battle-ground. And yet we presume to despair of the world, to despair of mankind, to despair of any universal reign on earth of knowledge, purity and goodness! That is presumptuous sin. We are not entitled to despair of anything that concerns God, of anything in which He employs us, until at least we have tried our utmost, spent our best strength and found it all

unavailing. So far as the future is concerned, there is great hope in the fact, with large vindication of God, that the forces of Good and Evil have never yet come into full collision—that all the good have never yet found out the way of striving with the world's sin and sorrow, as if for the deliverance of their own spirits ; and until they have done this, we are not in circumstances to despair of God's Providence. *One Man* did this, and from *his* heart all despair vanished ; he “saw Satan like lightning fall from Heaven.”

And not only may those who are affluent in religious knowledge take no correspondent part in the spiritual warfare of the world—they may fail to repel the evil even from their own borders. For a man to whom you can say nothing of God that he does not seem to know already, may readily confuse familiarity with religious views with a religious experience, and mistake plentiful information for habitual communion and obedience. Our full assent to spiritual truth often blinds us to its practical forgetfulness ; for how should we suspect ourselves of setting at nought our own doctrines and rules of life, which we are prepared to prove or to maintain against all gainsayers ? Even the richness of sentiment which large intellectual resources bring, an independence upon others for perhaps our strongest interests, may stifle real tenderness of feeling, real charity of life ; for those whose sensibilities are habitually touched through the imagination by an

intellectual medium of pictures and conceptions—who can enjoy love, terror and pity, and the beauty of life as a mental luxury—will not naturally suspect themselves of hardness of heart, or of apathy towards suffering, even when they shun all contact with actual evil, and know nothing of the homely self-denials, the face-to-face intercourses with the world's rougher and coarser ways, of a working beneficence. How many are moved to admiration by Christ's treatment of the polluted and the penitent, who would not suffer the correspondent guilt of this world to touch even the hem of their garments, and yet are ready to mistake the sensibility that thrills for the heart that helps and suffers, that is willing to identify itself with the lowly and fallen, if only it may share with them its own strength, its treasure of hope and holy things! The thoughts that stock the mind, the pictures and emotions that are so familiar to the nerves and the fancy, may by their vividness conceal from us that they are but gliding images crossing the field of mental vision, with no real effect upon ourselves, either as agents or as sufferers,—that their truth does not sanctify us, nor their power strengthen us, nor their sweetness subdue us.

Now this it is which practically breaks interest in religion. It is a matter of Doing and of Being, and we make it a matter of Knowing. The administration of religion has become associated with the rhetori-

cian's art ; the prophet has sunk into the orator, and spiritual teaching is made a matter of doctrines and of words. But who, now, can speak a *new* word about God, and Duty, and Christ, and divine things? Revelation itself seems stale, and men turn away, exclaiming, "All is barren." But if they came to it with the feeling that their sole interest in it was to transfer "these things" into the substance of their own being, what a revolution might take place in their mode of regarding the simplest matters affecting God and Christ! The interest of the intellect alone, of speculative knowledge, is rapidly exhausted in religion, and is kept alive only by a succession of artificial terrors or stimulants. All spiritual interests that do not pass into action and become new growths of character, all passive feelings that bring no exercise, waste the springs of health. Sensibility, penitence, aspiration, the shocked gaze of self-knowledge, only consume the soul, burn its strength to ashes, when they do not move the struggling effort to escape from self, and take some actual step into the onward infinite of Goodness. It is as though we stood in a motionless trance, and watched slowly burning out in our lamps the oil whose flame was given to guide our steps upon some forward way. Coleridge has remarked that "Truths, of all others the most awful and interesting, are too often considered as *so* true, that they lose all the power of truth, and lie bed-ridden in the dormitory of the


soul ;" but, "that there is one sure way of giving freshness and importance to the most *commonplace* maxims—that of *reflecting* on them in direct reference to our own state and conduct, to our own past and future being. To restore a commonplace truth to its first *uncommon* lustre, you need only *translate* it into action." And so there is one and only one way of keeping alive a growing interest in religion, and that is by the endeavour to convert it into our own being, to have no thought of God or Christ, no view of life or heaven, which we do not seek so to weave into our temper and our spirit that it may mould our deeds and breathe our peace.

We cannot be surprised at the weariness which besets people on religious subjects considered in a merely didactic way, except when some party or personal interest is excited in matters of speculative theology in which for the most part no purely religious feeling is involved ; for the vital truth lies in a few simple spiritual experiences, in a few simple spiritual convictions ; and what can be *said* to give a man an interest in prayer who does not pray, who has no daily aim of living in intercourse with God, and does not know either the difficulties or the blessedness of this heart communion : or what can make a deep and earnest theme of Christian humility to one who does not invite into his soul the gaze of the All-perfect, whose thoughts are for the most part on things as low

or lower than himself : or of the meekness and gentleness of Christ to a man who will not reflect that nothing short of the Spirit of our Father in us can keep us guileless, forbearing and forgiving, with a love that hopes all things and thinks no evil, and who therefore never stands still in sudden horror at himself, and asks God and man to pardon him, when he finds that in his thoughts he has been offending against holy charity ? If our interest in religion was one with our effort to be ourselves in all "these things" one of God's spiritual forces—holy, for God is holy—merciful, for God is merciful—how could the interest of that life-struggle ever fail ? What earnest word of faith and truth, though it was old as the ages, would not have for us a fresh and infinite significance ? And then, instead of seeking religious excitement in the direction of new knowledge, rather might we entreat, as those of old, "that the Word should not be spoken to us any more ;" that responsibilities full of arduous interest were crowding too fast upon us ; that already our views were far above our life, and leaving us hopelessly behind ; that our temper, and habits, and frame of soul, had yet to be brought into conformance with the relations already discerned ; that "such knowledge was too high for us, and we could not attain unto it." We must think that instead of there being too little spiritual light in this world for our guidance, there is far too much for our peace, faithless as we are. Rather are we all living

under a Light that is too strong for us—accustomed to hear great truths until they have lost their power—treating God's inspirations with that kind of effortless familiarity which destroys respect—enervated by a spiritual climate where we find enjoyment without exercise—enfeebled by the growing disproportion between what we know and what we are, or what we strive to do. Buddha's definition of Virtue is, the agreement of the *Will* with the Conscience.

Vast indeed are the responsibilities of Knowledge : to have the veil lifted up, the eyes opened, so that never again can we put off our obligations, nor know, like unburdened children, the untasked times of our ignorance, and plead in innocence, "Lord, I knew not that it was Thy Will." It is indeed true that if we know these things, happy are we if we do them ; but it is equally true that if we do them not, then unhappy are we that we know them. For the servant that knew his Lord's will and did it not, is beaten with many stripes ; and there is hope of recovered blessedness only so long as the inward wounds are acutely painful, and Conscience is so actively alive that she never drops the lash. To see as with God's eyes and yet do our own works and follow our own will, is to meet light everywhere whilst we are looking for a place where dark deeds may hide. Whither shall we go from Thy Spirit ? Whither shall we flee from Thy presence ?



Now we all know the whole body of Christian truth : our tongues could speak it with unfaltering readiness. We look up to Heaven and call God our Father ; we look upon man and say he is our Brother ; we look upon the earth and say it is the scene of Providence, the temple not built with hands, where day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge ; we look within and say that though the outward man perish, the inward man may be renewed day by day ; we look upon death and say it is our birthday into immortal life, and that we are changed only because flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God :—our eyes have seen, our ears have heard, all this, so that never again can we steal back to an irresponsible time : we “*know* these things” so fully that God Himself can make us know them better only through the doing of His Will. Yet if knowledge multiplies responsibilities, happy are we if we accept them, for then we have our Lord’s money with usury ; we have ourselves added something, the something that makes them ours, to that which He has given—we have added the fellowship of our own spirit and the toil of our own will. Yet are there many to whom the very thought of responsibilities is grievous. We speak not of rebelling wills, but of timid, trembling spirits, to whom God is hardly felt as a Father, so terrible is His aspect as a Judge—to whom Religion assumes the form only of conscious unworthiness, and diseased

introspection, and agonizing questions, showing that they cling too close to themselves, that they do not throw off self-regarding fears in the blessed life of Action and Endeavour, that they do not seek in that direction the freedom of their being, with Duty as a clear way on which to travel, and the sense of God as a life-element. It is a true saying, that "doubt of whatever kind can be ended by action alone;" for God's blessing is always with unselfish labour. He blesses the effort even when it does not reach its mark, and in the sense of blessing the doubt is lost in peace. Under the strokes of earnest force the glow of life comes out in warmth and joy, and all that is morbid in us retires into forgetfulness, as not belonging to one who is in any real relations with the healthy purposes of God.

There may, indeed, be much true life in us that God does not permit to be conspicuously manifested: outward action is only the sign of an inward power, the place and the manner in which a spiritual force shows itself to be present; and often God Himself contracts the means and opportunities of this activity. We are not to suppose that such visible activity is necessary to the inward life of a great spirit; this would be to confound the sign with the thing signified. The most energetic spirit in the world may, by physical debility or other causes, be made the prisoner of the Lord, and denied for the present a full sphere of manifestation;

and, as meek love has often shown, power is not lost by such compression, rather is it chastened and husbanded, if only the willing heart remains and all the outlets used that God leaves open. That God has circumscribed our life may add a peculiar element of trial, but often it defines our way and cuts off many tempting possibilities that perplex the free and the strong; whilst it leaves intact the whole body of spiritual reality, with the Beatitude thereon, "that if we know these things, happy are we if we do them." We know that God orders the lot; and to meet it with the energies it requires and permits, neither more nor less—to fill it at every available point with the light and action of an earnest and spiritually inventive mind, though its scene be no wider than a sick chamber, and its action narrowed to patient suffering and gentle, cheerful words, and all the light it can emit the thankful quiet of a trustful eye,—without chafing as though God had misjudged our sphere, and placed us wrong, and did not know where we could best serve Him—this is what, in that condition, we *have to do*—filial service enough through which to draw very nigh unto God, and "the doer shall be blessed in his deed."

And, in fact, we know not in what circumstances of apparent feebleness, of lowliness or limitation, or of utter unlikeliness, God may permit great spiritual power to show itself, and become His minister to the widest extent and in the highest things. The Disciples

thought that Christ was altogether out of his place when he was washing their feet ; yet this was the occasion on which the text was spoken. God, they thought, had no need of a Messiah for such offices ; he ought to have been taking up his great power *and reigning*. And so he was, if they had known it. He knew it well ; for it is perhaps the most marvellous perfection, the most unapproachable height of the Son of Man, that he could speak consciously of his own place and mission, speak of himself as set to be an Example and Forerunner, and yet lose nothing of the simplicity of his spiritual life, of its fresh flow from God. Ordinary men are so totally incapable of this, that we have come to regard self-consciousness as something wrong in itself ; but that is our limitation. That we may know all that God has designed us for, all that we may be, and yet refer nothing to ourselves, Christ has shown to be possible. "Ye call me Master and Lord ; and ye say well, for so I am." He is ever the true Master and Lord of men who will serve, help and deliver them. Service, helpfulness, guidance, is lawful *mastery* in this world. And this is a power in itself so divine that circumstance and place cannot conceal it ; it is always making itself felt. It has broken forth from that lowly chamber and that blinded company, and filled the earth with its glory. "If any man will be great among you, let him become the servant of all." "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them."

To use the words of one of the Cambridge Latitudinarians, which, though spoken more than two hundred years ago, alas! neither his own Church, nor any other Church, has yet fully understood—Christian knowledge “is a knowing of ‘the truth as it is in Jesus,’ as it is in a Christ-like nature, as it is in that sweet, mild, humble, loving spirit of Jesus, which spreads itself, like a morning sun, upon the souls of good men, full of light and life.”*

* Smith’s Select Discourses, p. 8 : Cambridge, 1859.

VIII.

The Spirit willing, the flesh weak.



MATT. xxvi. 41:

“ Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

THERE are two natures in each of us, the body and the soul, the instincts and the aspirations, the promptings of the spiritual nature, and the gravitation towards ease or self-indulgence of the natural man. And for the most part the two natures are suffered to maintain an independent existence, neither being brought into permanent subjection, but weak and powerful by turns, each having its way in its season of predominance.

And so little do we question ourselves about any ruling purpose, any order and symmetry of life—a long habit of committing ourselves to courses that are determined by accident, by pressure from without, by inclination, has so stifled a demand for the harmony and unity of being, which all other creatures instinctively observe, that we escape any painful or revolting sense of discord and inconsistency: we not only yield

to changing moods, but seem to carry our whole nature into them ; so that being, for the time, natural in *each* of our states, we make nature its own justification, without inquiring *which* nature it is we are obeying, and live without suspicion of the manifold contradictions our characters present.

This is the description of a being in whom conscience takes no place of command, and is only a co-ordinate power, *one* among the crowd of directing inclinations ; and it is very much the habitual life of us all : we do as nature inclines, or as circumstances determine ; we are what we are, or we are as it may happen ; but we impose no law upon ourselves, and enforce no unity of spirit. Thus Peter was perfectly natural, and perfectly sincere, in the sense of reflecting truly the whole feeling of the time, when he vowed that he would cheerfully go to meet death for his Master, and no doubt, if the crisis had come at the moment, would have proved equal to the boast ; and then, yielded to the next direction of his nature, which happened to be one of mere weariness and exhaustion, sinking into slumber when wakefulness was most needed ; and then, awoke suddenly, without forethought or preparation, to find danger close at hand, and yielded to an instinct of terror, and let the coward-prompting carry him to such a pitch of surrender to the nature that was uppermost, as in his Lord's presence, and with panic oaths, to deny that he knew him ;

and then, met the eye of Christ, and yielded to that power, and went out and wept bitterly.

Wherever the soul is put in charge of the life, wherever there is spiritual solicitude and clear perception of the duty of self-discipline, such easy submission to mere tendencies becomes impossible ; at least a painful sense of discord is created, a disturbed self-consciousness appears ; and if there is still a divergence between the Spirit and the Flesh, it is no longer because each in its season is permitted its own way, without an attempt to reconcile them, but because the willingness of the Spirit is left at the mercy of the unguarded weakness of the Flesh, and then all the peculiarities of positive sin come into existence,—namely, a sense of defeated desires, of betrayed purposes, of abandoned right, with the testimony of a guilty conscience.

There are three imperfect states in which the relations of our actual life to our ideal, or rule of life, may exist : two of them absolutely wrong, the third only an approximation to right. Instead of introducing the ideal life into the actual life, as outward conditions and the growing strength of the affections and the conscience will permit, a man may give over any real attempt to embody a heavenly spirit in an earthly life, and yet, in a meditative, sentimental, self-centred dream, devote himself to the contemplation of what is good and perfect ; and this is the *mystic's* way of living above the world, and of having a unity of being. His

ideal and his actual are never in *felt* opposition, because he turns from the actual and lives in the ideal alone.

Again, there is the antithesis of this, when the actual, life as it is, this warm, breathing world, is embraced with healthy zest and energy, whilst the ideal of life is unthought of and disappears ; and this is the way in which the *natural man* has a unity of being. With him the ideal and the actual are never in recognized opposition, because he turns from the ideal and lives in the actual alone. The *mystic* ignores the actual, the kingdom of God in the world ; the natural man ignores the ideal, the kingdom of God in the soul ; and neither even attempts the true problem of life, which is to incorporate the ideal in our actual—to be in this world, according to our power and our place, what Christ was, even the Word made flesh. By obliterating one side of God's demands upon us, though we cannot reach spiritual harmony, we may, for a time, escape conflict.

And, thirdly, there is the mixed state, the common condition of us all, in which the ideal and the actual are brought, or sought to be brought, into some practical correspondence—but feebly, fitfully, incompletely—in which the prompting of the spirit often yields to temptation, and infirmity prevails with the express knowledge of sin. This *may* be a more Christian condition than that of the mystic or of the natural man, for at least the true spiritual problem is before us, the work and achievement of THE WILL in our earthly

discipline distinctly set out ; yet is it a condition of more suffering ; for the sense of internal discord is painfully awakened, the willing Spirit and the weak Flesh are in felt opposition, and unless strength is obtained for the higher principle, it may end in distresses of conscience from which the mystic and the worldling, to whom the sense of sin is not present, can now escape. Spiritual unrest, so far better than unreal peace, may mark a soul that at least is seeking God, longing after Him, though as yet it has not found Him.

Now it is this condition of spirit, this state of recognized infirmity, in which a weakness, a temptation, that is against our conscience, against our desires, yet conquers us, which we are at present to consider. We may desire *to be* what is right, *to do* what is right, and yet be practically thwarted by our own weakness, whilst yet a power to conquer remains with us, if we would exert it. "The good that I would," says St. Paul, describing this condition, "I do not : the evil which I would not, that I do." When does this take place ? What is the nature of the cases in which the willing spirit is thus betrayed and defeated by the mortal instruments ?

- I. There are impulses from the spirit, promptings from within, which are not properly *ours* until we have made them so, by breathing, and living, and having our being within their inspiration. They come

by no effort and from no merit of our own ; they are of *God's* grace, and make no part of our individual personality until we appropriate them by entire fidelity of being. No creature can make for its nature dictates and directions higher than those which its Creator gives it. No creature except man can abuse or be unfaithful to nature, or to any part of it ; and in us it would be the perfection of goodness, of blessedness, simply that we should persevere in executing the merciful, righteous and gracious things that God suggests to us. Man's province is not that of supplying himself with inspirations, but that of earnest and loyal obedience, against the resistance of lower inclinations, to those which God supplies. "Work *out* your own salvation," says the Apostle, "for God of His own accord is always working *in* you." We have nothing to do with the work of inspiration, but only with the work of obedience, which fits us for higher inspirations. You are on the way perfectly to find God and your own blessedness, if you will only permit Him at each stage of your growth to be your ruling spirit. He *gives* the divine direction, *suggests* the generous purpose, *prompts* the merciful act ; from Him is the impulse of kindness, the vision of love, the hunger of the heart for pure, unselfish joy. It is ours to work together with His Spirit, yielding our members as its instruments, and so to glorify ourselves in Him.

Now these divine promptings, in the moments they

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are upon us, are so strongly felt, and bring a peace so strange and clear, that we arrogate them as ours already; and forget the conditions of possession—that they are really the *solicitations* of God, of the Holy Spirit in the soul, the door of heaven opened for a moment by God's Hand to give us a gleam of the incorruptible blessedness—not *ours* yet, but our Father's *call* upon us for the corresponding works of sacrifice and love; and that to mistake them for ours, at that stage, is to confuse God's province with our own, that which *He* works in us with that which *we* have to work *out*.


Hence is it, to take the simplest illustration, that men make gracious offers which they do not perform, utter words which raise expectations that they never realize; not that they were insincere in the act of promise, for then a kindly impulse was upon them, and they spoke as the spirit moved, and if the *feeling* could have executed itself then and there, it would no doubt have had its fulfilment; but the details of labour, of practical effort, by which alone any such desires can be executed, were not present to the conscience; and though the promise was made without conscious insincerity in the act of its utterance, it was made with levity and without spiritual thoughtfulness. The cost was not counted; the tower was in the air, not one stone of it laid, whilst yet we spoke of it as a thing accomplished; and this profession of *real* pur-

pose, the putting it forward as *fact*, though never to be made good by faithful deeds, was a presumptuous sin. If the willing spirit had but remembered, as in honesty it ought, that only by some strain on weak and infirm parts of us, which often claim indulgence on their own account, can any such purpose be executed, the whole extent of our engagement would have been before us in the same moment that the impulse to enter into it was most powerful,—and instead of a luxury of feeling to which we were in nowise entitled, we might have had an honourable purpose that would have justified itself. All unkept promises, that came from a righteous impulse when they were spoken, are examples of the willingness of the Spirit and the weakness of the Flesh.

To confound God's inspirations with our own goodness, leads to failure in another way. Knowing the reality of the impulse, the desire of the spirit, and unconsciously accrediting *ourselves* with it, we are not led to suspect the poverty or insufficiency of our efforts in its service. Conscious of what we have felt, we attribute the willingness to ourselves, the failure to circumstance ; whereas the momentary willingness was from God, and the practical failure was entirely our own. We colour our poor being with the glory of the great and merciful thoughts which God puts into us ; whilst in reality nothing is *ours* but the personal sacrifice we have made, the labour we have given, the

amount of conscientious will we have put forth against disabling weakness ; and in judging of this, we must not add to it the prompting of the spirit, but rather weigh the prompting against the work, to see if the practical effort which alone is ours, is adequate to the inspiration which is entirely God's.

Take the case of Benevolence, for example ; not in the form of casual, self-relieving charity which eases the pain of sympathy by unconscientious alms, but of that considerate and effective help, not without sacrifice, which produces large results—by full and well-timed aid restores a family to the opportunities from which by inevitable pressure they were sinking, or confers at once a new power and scope of action on some important undertaking. How often do we conclude with ourselves, knowing the desire of the Spirit, that we have really gone to the limits of our means, to the limits of prudence, and yet find that it requires only the will of the Flesh to be excited, some inclination that we dare not in comparison identify with the Spirit of God, to make the available means appear in the requisite abundance ! A picture, an ornament, an entertainment, an article of refinement or luxury, a journey of pleasure, after our charity has, as we think, been strained, will draw from us what would warm the life of some good endeavour, and place us, as the world reckons such things—for in matters of pecuniary generosity the world sells great reputations very



cheaply—in the ranks of munificent benefactors. Not that the work of art, or the luxury, or the journey of pleasure, are wrong in themselves ; there is nothing in all this world that is wrong in itself except as it is in conflict with something that is better. There is nothing in our nature, or in all the desires of our nature, certainly not in the infirmities of the flesh, which is wrong in itself, provided it keeps its place—provided what is lower does not encroach upon what is higher—provided that, by choice of a worse when a better is before us, we do not forfeit the benediction, “Blessed is he who condemneth not himself in that which he alloweth !”

II. The willing spirit is betrayed by infirmity when, leaving the weaker nature unconsidered, we do not provide for the difference between the ideal, or distant, contemplation of difficult action, and the unexpected resistance which suddenly makes its appearance when the action has to be done. We fail in action because we have not foreseen the defalcation of the feeble, shrinking, capricious instruments by which, or with the consent of which, all difficult action has to be performed,—the loosened nerves, the reluctant brain, the faint heart, the exhausted or slothful body craving its own indulgence. These, if no watchful guard of prayer has stood above them, to anticipate inaction and suppress rebellion, will assuredly in the moment of execution refuse their part of the task, and mock the visionary purpose of the soul. There is a serene

and lustrous state of spirit when we contemplate life and duty without immediate reference to practical difficulties : the friction of circumstance is not present ; our weakness is not felt, for action is not then required ; the images of hope and possibility come delightfully near to us out of the ideal future ; they take defined forms and float in tranquil light ; and if we only remembered, in that hour of clear inward vision, that all the conditions of the problem of possession were not then before us, that there is another and a weaker self which yet has to be the agent in the works of the spirit, that only through its service and sacrifice can the soul execute its purpose, we might bring our whole being under the same dominion, place both our strength and our weakness under the guardian Hand of God, and win the humble confidence that in the crisis of trial no unexpected enemy could rise up and cast us down. I suppose most of us have had experience of the different aspects under which a difficult duty appears, when viewed calmly over-night, and when brought bodily into the practical glare of the next day. Whatever is the point of difficulty,—a confession to be made, a painful question to be plainly asked, a weakening connection to be decisively broken, a doubtful way that opens or closes our future to be questioned where it leads, a real sacrifice that conscience suggests, but which man could not ask, to be made secure against our possible shrinkings and weak-

ness by the one bold word that commits us to it,—how many have thrown away their peace, reputation and most blessed hopes, cast their earthly fate out of their own hands, solely from the difference in the character of their resolutions between the evening and the morning, between the time when the Spirit spoke alone, and the time when the Spirit and the Flesh mixed their counsels! It is related in the history of the Martyrs, that some sought that glory with so false a zeal, that they never remembered the feeble, sensitive nature that had to suffer until the pains of death stood before them, and then, trembling and terror-struck, sunk into compliance with the persecutor's mandate. And that is precisely the case with all of us who suffer the willingness of the Spirit to be betrayed by the weakness of the Flesh: we will not prepare ourselves to be martyrs, witnesses for God.

III. The willing Spirit is often defeated by more definite infirmity. There may be a weakness, or even a vice, in the character, which, though it resists and obscures the directions of the Spirit, does not altogether destroy them. Some one self-indulgence may taint a multitude of noble qualities, not killing them, but spoiling them of their fruits. One unguarded part of us will at a critical moment make our whole strength like water, and leave us nothing but the consciousness of ineffectual desires and the bitterness of shame. All that we hold most dear may be rendered

impossible to us by mere *fits* of weakness. The desire of the heart may be prevented by an angry word, a haughty look, a passing temper. The purpose of a life may be defeated by the sluggard's bed, by aimless absence of mind, by an unguarded stupor of the soul in the moment of need for vigilant promptitude and energy, as when the disciples slept in Gethsemane, and awoke, panic-stricken, to forsake their Lord, with whom they would not watch and pray.

Sometimes the infirmity that undermines the great aims of existence, and keeps us for ever on the lower rounds of ambition's ladder, is an indulged shrinking from patient industry in the slow steps by which the foundations of intellectual strength are laid. Many are the cases in which the eager spirit dreams of eminence and might achieve it, but the light nature recoils from application, and even the elements of mental power are left unmastered. How many of us never know what rich things God has put into our nature, what glorious possessions lie hidden thick and clustered in the cells of thought, and live in ignorance even of our own great faculties, because we will not work those inward mines! All who labour with the mind know the fear and hopelessness with which any difficult subject is at first approached, and the sudden light that breaks upon it when the act of attention is long sustained. And it is just that act of attention, the sustaining of the spirit against the natural recoil of

any weaker part, that makes all the difference between success and failure, between greatness and nothingness.

IV. And sometimes the willing spirit will, if unguarded, have its purpose and its peace snatched away from it, not by an evil temptation, but as it were by the Hand of God Himself, in storms of life and reverses of fortune that seem to change the whole aspects of existence. Death, coming at an unlooked-for time, taking without a warning the strong mind that held our weakness up—the loving heart, with which all thoughts of earth's happiness were twined—overpowering trouble so dark that death would brighten it—the deep pollution of another coming very near our own life—sudden trials of principle in new and abnormal circumstances that shift our whole position, and render inapplicable all ordinary habits of mind—these overthrow many a character, or rather they test its substantial spirit, and prove what its insight, prayer, and watchfulness had been. For even here it is still true that "there hath no temptation taken us but such as is common to man." We know that all these things, in their most unexpected and terrible forms, are a portion of God's ways with men, possibly therefore within our own lot. We might break the keen edge of their suddenness, and by prayer and watchfulness have laid down "the way of escape, that we should be able to bear them."

V. And if the willing spirit, goodness of purpose

128 *The Spirit willing, the Flesh weak.*

and the inspiration of God, can fall before constitutional infirmity left without a spiritual guard, what shall we say of those who wilfully nurse the weakness that degrades them, who not only neither watch nor pray against the lower nature, but solicit its temptations, provoke its passions, excite them when they would slumber, until the body and the soul have so changed places that even the willingness of the spirit disappears !

One remark in the way of exposition : Christ is not describing the peculiar case of the disciples, but the general case of human nature. He is describing what he understood to be his own case as well as theirs, and he observed for himself the means of spiritual protection which he recommended to them. It is the property of Spirit to be willing for all good things ; it is the property of Flesh instinctively to withdraw itself from strain and pain ; and the Spirit has an unlimited power in God of control over the lower and instrumental nature. By the exertion of that power, which we always can exert *if we will*, both Flesh and Spirit reach a perfection and beatitude otherwise unattainable by either. This no doubt involves an account of the origin of sin the direct opposite of that which prevails. Christ says, "the Spirit is willing," that the child is born a member of the kingdom of heaven ; St. Paul says, "God is ever working in us," so that sin consists in the weakness that suffers His promptings

to plead in vain. And whether this is not the true account of his own evil, that he sins against the suggestions of the Holy Spirit in him, let every man ask his own heart.

And in whatever respect we have had experience of infirmity, in whatever direction our weakness appears, we know that spiritual power is unlimited, and that we can, *if we will*, make the lower nature the servant and instrument of the Spirit. It is a question for the WILL alone, in persevering co-operation with the Spirit of God. And at least, in every hour of danger, in every crisis of life, before going where we know that temptations lie in wait, before venturing upon seas on which the treasures of faith and conscience may be strewn like wrecks upon the waters, shall we not hear our Lord pleading with us his own example—"What! could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

For be it ever remembered that Christ feared and trembled in his previsions and meditations, and nowhere else—when the danger was yet absent, never when it was present. How wonderful, indeed, is the self-knowledge he displayed—that he, who was never betrayed by infirmity, should so arm himself against it, in those great hours of inspiration when weakness does not naturally appear, and others are apt to remember nothing but their intentions and their strength!

130 *The Spirit willing, the Flesh weak.*

He knew what is in man, and how it is that God perfects His strength in our weakness, and makes His grace sufficient for us.

IX.

Circumstance, "the unspiritual god."



MATT. xxiv. 26:

"If they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert, go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers, believe it not. For as the lightning cometh out of the East, and shineth even unto the West, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be."

THERE is a natural tendency, from which the present age with its vaunted culture is not free, to put faith in material agencies as causes of results in no intelligible connection with them. Our moral securities are mainly mechanical; mind is becoming a department of physics; and the searchers into the mysteries of thought and the special facts of the invisible world conduct their inquiries through material media. These are the gold-seekers and alchemists of the modern world; and their first principle is, that physical conditions and processes are our spiritual illuminators.

In Education, the old faith in an exact training, a vigorous discipline of mind, has been yielding to a growing confidence in the dexterous appliance of favourable circumstances. The old idea, that the true

method was through the effort of the pupil, and the fittest subjects for its exercise and richest results the abstract sciences and the severest forms of language, has been passing into the belief that the effort belongs to the teacher, that the pupil, without toiling to acquire, may be made to receive, and that the fitting matter for this method is the communication of facts, as if the current coin of general knowledge available in the world, not the development of faculty and power, was the object of the school.

In Medicine, it seems the general impression that where nothing is known, nothing is unlikely; that where all things are possible, or not shown to be impossible, a trial of anything cannot be refused; that nothing in the way of remedy can be so apparently unreasonable as to exempt from the obligation of giving it a chance; and that to desire an explanation before you are committed to new expedients, is a fatal pedantry. But here, as everywhere, to have to look for Circumstance without a law of guidance, is to leave the spirit without peace.

In political and social life appears the same easy faith in the power of Circumstance to produce radical good, as, for instance, that by a physical arrangement of the machinery of elections, both true and precious results may be obtained from those on whose political morality, patriotism, honour or honesty, there is no reliance.

Still more painfully in its own realm of spiritual reason has the reasonable spirit been dethroned, by unnatural attempts to reach the invisible through bodily manifestations, from which it is difficult not to revolt with a mixed protest of the understanding and the soul, in earnest effort to turn away the hearts of men from outward refuges of lies to those inward laws of our eternal life and light which are the methods of the spirit, and never will abate one tittle of their severe and serene enactments.

The same mechanical reliances, trusting for inward good to outward accidents, are manifested in relation to the moral health of individuals. Circumstance, "that unspiritual god,"* is with many their first and last hope ; change of scene, of occupation, of external condition, the only regenerating influence they distinctly recognize. They think to exhibit spiritual results from other than spiritual sources, and by rearranging a man's lot to transform his character. Not in the power of the Will over self and over circumstance, but in the power of favourable circumstances over it, lies their expectation of a new life. But it is a blind game ; Heaven only knows what are favourable circumstances,—and it is not in that direction, but in the ruling and nourishment of his own spirit, that God has given to man knowledge and power, and placed his responsibility.

* Lord Byron.

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Yet, hope from Circumstance is not without large reason, and its abuse perhaps is partly the temporary reaction sure to spring from the long neglect of natural laws. Certainly there is a mighty power in Circumstance, and as certainly there has often been an ignorant and cruel forgetfulness of that fact, a rigid exaction of the tale of work from minds either incapacitated by constitution, or subject to hard and withering influences, or otherwise placed under impossible conditions. But to yield to Circumstance its full power, both in opening and in shutting the heart of man, is very far from conceding that there is no power above Circumstance, or from sinking into the dreary materialism that God, instead of living and moving in our souls only touches us from without. Doubtless the vices of men often come from their circumstances; but as doubtless the great virtues of men are in the direct face of Circumstance, and inward strength of Will is more at our own command than outward facilities or exemptions from temptation.

Reliance on Circumstance, on "the unspiritual god," has for its natural fellow the common system of excuses which finds the explanation of evil in the element of temptation. But temptation is an occasion, not a cause, and no more an occasion for shameful transgression than for magnanimous duty. Since the first man said, "It was the woman did it," the men of Adam's mould have not been ashamed to acknowledge

that, when tempted, in their own soul was no virtue, in their own will no resistance. If temptations justify sin, then the spiritual life, and Christianity, and man's strength in God, are words that signify nothing; for no man could sin if no man was tempted, and only in resistance to the tempter can the spirit's allegiance have existence or exercise. A Christian man, indeed, when most strict with himself, will yet be tender to another, not knowing all the case; but what if our tenderness relax that other's strength,—though it is not tenderness, but only looseness and remissness, that will have this effect. Let our tenderness spring freely from our justice, our humility, our self-knowledge, our generous insight, but never from a relaxed holiness, an ungodly concession to the might of Circumstance. No reasonable man will deny that Circumstance ought to be considered, and wisely marshalled, and tenderly dealt with,—but every spiritual man will deny that it ought to rule, or that to it ever can belong the right to thrive and justify. It was not denied that man lives by bread, when it was declared that he lives not by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God, by every inspiration from on high, every holy prompting, every exalting hope, every sense of responsibility to the Source of our being, and that from these is drawn an order of strength that comes not from food or wine. "I have meat to eat that ye know not of."


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The same spirit of outward dependence is shown in the undue importance attached to what is called Experience. It would appear a general belief that all valuable wisdom comes from an extensive acquaintance with men and things, and knowledge of life as it is more to be trusted than the great primal teachers, the authoritative voices in our nature, the original shapings and directions of our being, the whispers and leadings of God. "The wisdom that is from above," the wisdom from within, is a fountain of goodness, "full of mercy and of all good fruits." It would not be untrue to say, that in all essential things Experience is the teacher only of fools, of those who have gone astray through turning a deaf ear to the voice of a prior and more legitimate teacher. There are invaluable lessons of life—much skill, much helpfulness, knowledge of where the need is and sympathy should be—which Experience alone can supply; but alas for him who has got his virtues from his experience of life, for then his first experiences must have been of wrong-doing, and his later experience but the corrector of errors, or of vices, through penal consequences. To our spiritual being the experience of life is not the fountain of right, the source of law, though it ever confirms and seals with its testimony the teachings of nature and of God. In these fundamental things, he who, constrained by Experience, at last "comes to *himself*," has first fled from himself; he who, coerced by trouble,

reduced to the coarse and bitter husks of a wasted life, says at last, "I will arise, and go to my Father," has first known, and been obdurate to, his Father's voice. That "Honesty is the best Policy" is a teaching of Experience; but it was well said, that he who has waited for this experience to teach him honesty, or who is honest only in the faith of this experience, the first began his course in knavery, and the second remains a knave at heart. It is not knowledge of the world that makes a child's heart shrink from meanness, falsehood, dishonour: this wisdom is not borrowed from Experience, but that which shapes Experience when it is best shaped. It would be dangerous error to inculcate on the young, as a lesson in modesty, such deference to older experience as might weaken their reliance on the primal teachings of God. In no way has spiritual life been so much dwarfed, severed from its feeding spring, as by the substitution of the wisdom of man for the fresh inspirations of God. In truth, in the highest things experience of life is not our guide, but rather the touchstone of our weakness, for we all degenerate, if not from the attainments, certainly from the ideals of our youth. The best man is worse than his thought; and the worst has not extinguished the inciting light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world. Experience is a mighty helper, but sometimes a timid counsellor, an unspiritual leader. Often the wisest counsel, that which alone subdues the

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difficulty, is the simplest utterance of sincerity and truth, a wisdom that comes from babes. Nor when experience is most helpful does it supply the moving power it wisely directs. It gives fitness for functional offices, makes a man a good servant of special work, but not from it are the issues of life, with the generous heart, the noble purpose, the desire and impulse after things good and honourable on which all other fitnesses are moulded. To the uncorrupted, the use of Experience is not to impart principles of life, but to aid in the application of them ; and he is the nearest to God, the readiest disciple of His Spirit, who for the former purpose needs the least of it, who remains for ever, as Christ said he was born, a member of the kingdom of heaven. Even a knowledge of men, as distinguished from a knowledge of man, comes not so much from acquaintance with the world, as from self-knowledge, the reading and searching of our own spirit. The faithfulness of Shakespere's portraits, drawn from all regions of life, is not owing to their being transcripts from a world-wide experience, but from his insight into the laws and possibilities of the nature in himself. The keys of sympathy are with him who knows every secret of his own heart. And hence the obligation to individuality of life ; hence our exemption from dependence on accidental advantages for our spiritual peace, grace and treasure ; hence our direct accountability to God for the highest demands He makes



upon those whom He calls to His service ; hence the privilege of youth to impress the law of its own conscience upon Experience, not as subject to it, but as framer and master over it ; hence, too, the respect which all men owe to youthful aspiration, until the respect has been forfeited, the aspiration dishonoured, by moral infidelity.

The same unreal dependence on Circumstance is shown in the exaggerated importance ascribed to peculiar advantages of education in the formation of eminently endowed minds. There is indeed, except with those to whom God has given the irrepressible power of genius, a certain amount of culture necessary to excite the natural fertility of the soil, and to this extent development may depend on Circumstance ; but once education has gone so far as to give a man the idea of self-culture, to reveal to him his own nature and his responsibilities to it, there are no essential advantages, aids or incitements, which he may not find, or draw, within his reach. Biography abounds in the conquests and resources of self-made men. No one moved from within to the development of genius, or bent on the acquirement of special knowledge, was ever stopped by the want of outward appliances. There is, indeed, a culture which is mere deposit on the surface of the mind from intercourse with the society of whose life and ideas we partake, and is literally a product of circumstances ; but for a man once awa-

kened there is no indispensable help, even in the highest directions, which God has not placed within reach of us all. What the Prophet said of the great principles of life, is true also of whatever is essential for the growth of those principles, that it is not necessary to go up to heaven for them, nor over the seas, for that they are very nigh to us, even in our hearts, that we should know them and do them. Within these limits, the influences that build up the loftiest character, or nourish the richest seeds of intellectual life and beauty, are near, around, and within us all. And in this, Experience itself teaches us a great lesson of humanity, of brotherhood, destructive of class pride and class distinctions—that the most favoured in outward advantages are not so far removed from their fellow-men as they may think, or fear, they are ; for, if only the spiritual eye is open, whatever is indispensable for our blessedness or our perfectness lies close to the common nature and also to the common lot of us all. All the glories of outward nature are revealed in every landscape, in every sky, in every sunset, to whoever has cherished the inward sense, learned to look with his spirit through his eyes, and mused till "the fire burned," anywhere on God's creation. To all such, what the poet says of the healing power of the simplest natural influences over the impressible heart and tender spirits of the convalescent, a charm unnoticed

in the season of rude health and pre-occupied thoughts, is true at all times :


"The meanest floweret of the vale,
The simplest note that swells the gale,
The common earth, the air, the skies,
To him are opening paradise."*

Even the influences which are most peculiar, as belonging not to Nature but to Art, are yet denied to none, for every one who meditates on beauty, who contemplates ideals, is in soul an artist. The outward embodiment, the sensible reality in space, is not necessary to the inward power of the thought. The archetypes are in the mind, and only shaped, and to others made visible, by the tool. And so the spirit of man, "partaking of the Divine Nature," in imagination goes beyond the earthly workmanship of God, and ventures without impiety—nay, out of its piety, its worship of the perfect—to conceive of a beauty not realized on earth. Christ said of a man who spoke out of the intuitions of his uncorrupted nature, that he was not far from the kingdom of God ; and so, none of us need be far in any direction from the sources of all perfectness. Nature herself only expresses in outward form some of the possibilities that through her God suggests to all. It is not denied—far from it—that the full presence of the outward influence, in Art or Nature, may be a signal blessing, as the touch of Christ, the

* Gray.

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sight, the sense of his goodness, may awaken a soul sinking into moral insensibility, and exalt to new heights the hopes and visions of the best,—but only that to no one once awakened can the outward circumstance necessitate, or justify, an arrest of growth. All the influences that have led to all the heroism of the world, to all the greatness of history, lie in the primitive suggestions of the pure in heart, and no man has succeeded in expressing half the beauty that is in the heart of the "little child" of Christ. What is most needed for moral greatness is the simplicity to avow, the courage to maintain, the primal dictates. And so it is the highest result of old age to return to the heart of childhood, to verify, through trial, chastenings and corrections, the original teachings of God, even as it will be the highest result of Christianity itself to bring at last the whole world to the issues of Abraham's faith, through which he believed God and was His friend. And we must not say that to make good this earliest forecast would be little to gain from all experience since, for it is everything, or contains everything, to restore us to ourselves, to nature and to God, to make us independent of things accidental, to open perfectness on every spirit quickened from within, and through experience itself to bring the solemn conviction that we ourselves are the makers of experience, owing our responsibility to God because He gives us of His own nature, and calls us to do the



works of our Father,—and, as Christians farther recognize, has shown us the full type of life in giving us a Son of God in our humanity.

And so Christianity itself, though requiring a certain condition of human nature to become universal before it reaches that completion of its tendencies which will be the kingdom of God on earth, has always itself to create the circumstances that aid its further progress. By the action of Christ's life and faith on individual hearts, Christianity has to call into existence the conditions of its own growth. We sometimes hear the question asked, "Is Christianity to regenerate the world? Or must we wait for some great social revolution to create the circumstances in which Christianity can begin to act?" Vain is the hope, by any outward changes or reconstructions of society, to expect a sudden enhancement of Christianity to authorize the cry, "Lo, Christ is here!" or, "Lo, Christ is there!" except so far as, here or there, the spirit of Christ is becoming a moving and moulding power in individual souls. We speak, in our vague, irresponsible way, as if Christianity was now on earth a living person who had undertaken the direction and government of human affairs, and whom we are tempted to distrust or forsake because of his failures. But the living Christ is in heaven, and Christianity on earth lives and acts in individual hearts by the spirit of the Comforter to whom, in seeming defeat, he committed his work

and himself, and saw of the travail of his soul and was satisfied. You, all of us, every one who recognizes its truth and takes its name, is now, each in his place responsible, and alone responsible, for the fulness of its action. We hear men ask, with a strange shallowness, "Why does not Christianity, if it is true, effect more than it does?" Far more reasonably might they ask, "Why does not God do more than He does with this sinning and suffering world?" The real question is, "Why do not *we* do more, with our faith in Christianity, and our faith in God?"—and, "What do our deeds reveal of the character of that faith?" It would be well to lay to mind the simple truth, that there is no Christianity in the world but the faith which the spirit of the Comforter commends—in the Fatherly grace of God; the nearness of each to Heavenly care; the impress and imitableness of His holy Child; in the flow of mortal transition the onward movement of all humanity to immortal rest in God. These, the leaven of the faith that works by love, make the Christianity to which we look for the kingdom of heaven on earth; and these come from no favouring circumstance, but from our acceptance of the witness of God in, or against, whatever circumstance. "If any man shall say to you, 'Lo, here is Christ!' or, 'Lo, there is Christ!' believe him not. If they shall say to you, 'He is in the desert;' go not forth: or, 'Behold, he is in the secret chambers;' believe it not. For as the

lightning cometh out of the East, and shineth even unto the West, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be." As no man can hide, yet no man can mark, the progress of the day, from dawn to noon, from noon to glowing west, so is it with the coming of the Son of Man, an imperceptible diffusion in which light is communicated from point to point, in seasonal colour from infancy to age, each heart, each life, each spiritual eminence that has caught the radiance, becoming a centre of emanation until the knowledge of God shall flood the earth as the waters cover the great deeps. To compute the signs of Christ's coming is to number the hearts that are filled with his wisdom, the lives transfigured by his spirit, that pass through the successive phases of our mortality in some transparent fellowship with him who lighted all the ways of life for every man who cometh into the world.

And the resulting lesson of all these thoughts is, that each of us should feel that our great responsibilities are not so much derived from the circumstances in which we are, hard or happy, genial or unnourishing, as from the nature that God has given us, once quickened to a knowledge of itself, its source and its end. The insight of a pure heart will find a sufficiency of all good and blessing, of all grace and ornament of spirit, in the materials and opportunities of the most common life. And not here nor there, not in this new arrangement nor in that, must we look for Christ to

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come unto us, through some happy appliance to relieve the spirit of its burden, but rather invoke and solicit him from within, and burn up the baser alloy of our nature, the weak, low and sinning elements, in flames of the Spirit's prompting love and cleansing fire. Herein is the work assigned to the individual soul, to have life in itself, to make our sphere, whatever it is, sufficient for a reign of God within ourselves, for a true and full reign of our Father's abounding Spirit—thankful, unutterably thankful, if with the place and the companionship assigned to us we are permitted to build an earthly tabernacle of grace, and goodness, and holy love, a home like a temple; but, should this be denied us, resolved for our own souls that God shall reign there, for ourselves at least that we will not, by sin, or disobedience, or impious distrust, break with our own wills our filial connection with our Father—that whether joyful or sorrowing, struggling with the perplexity and foulness of circumstance or in an atmosphere of peace, whether in dear fellowship or alone, our desire and prayer shall be that God may have in us a realm where His will is law, and where obedience and submission spring, not from calculating prudence or ungodly fear, but from communion of spirit, ever humble aspiration, and ever loving trust. The elements of *happiness* in this present life no man can command, even if he could command himself, for they depend on the action of many wills, on the purity of many hearts,

and by the highest law of God the holiest must ever bear the sins and sorrows of the rest ; but over the *blessedness* of his own spirit Circumstance need have no control ; God has therein given an unlimited power to the means of preservation, of grace and growth, at every man's command. We know the Beatitudes of Christian life : and these are so far from being a product of Circumstance, that only against the contradiction, and in the conquest of, Circumstance do they reach their heights.

We can all be, if we will, and at our will, not indeed great and profitable servants, mighty ministers of His that excel in strength, but meek spirits hearkening to the voice of His word, faithful children that love His rule, and, notwithstanding the complexity of circumstance and of sorrow, the peace of God is ever given not as the world giveth, and passeth understanding.

X.

Heart Secrets of Joy and Bitterness.

PROVERBS xiv. 10 :

“The heart knoweth his own bitterness ; and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy.”

THERE is less of Joy, more of Bitterness, in life than the visible circumstance would lead us to expect. Why is it that with so many of the elements of happy being—with multitudes to whom all the necessities of existence are as things secure—with buoyant energies, and countless interests, and a field of work, and God's sure laws—with a limit to the power of sorrow over us, and no limit to the joy and hope of a spiritual being—there is yet so much of sadness and dissatisfaction over life, so much of troubled and constrained existence whose signs are written on the faces of men, but whose causes lie concealed in the hidden places of their souls? Nothing will account for this but some derangement of the spiritual nature, conscious or unconscious. By how slight a thing is peace spoiled! How nearly won! How narrowly lost! Observe the multitudes of men—see the outward smoothness and

promise—strip the coverings from their hearts—look for the drop of bitterness that turns their food to poison! What is it? In most cases it is sin—sin in some form, a sin of our own, or the sin of another; and if not a sin which we can touch and define, yet that measure of sin which denies us the feeling of fellowship with God, of having no barrier of separation raised by ourselves between us and Heaven. It is true that the sin which brings our sadness may grow out of our circumstances—that is, it may not spring from evil desires which we purpose to indulge, but from difficulties that our strength cannot cope with, that our wills cannot conquer, that our wisdom recoils from in confusion and despair; yet, when we fail so to deal with the elements of spiritual life and service placed at our disposal as to keep our souls within the shinings of God's light and love, if our want of energy is want of self-denial, there is no distinction between deserting God and yielding to circumstance. And in fact the energy not to desert the Right, as God shows it to us, is all that is essential to peace. If the inward law has been kept, God will rescue us from bitterness, though we have had no outward success, no immediate victory over the erring, suffering, or sinning souls cast in our way or bound in with our course of life; for Christ himself had not that kind of success. What *is* essential is something of the consciousness of Christ, that our failure is not owing to permitted sin,

to low insensibility, to the absence of holy desire or strenuous endeavour. Strange is the blessedness of those hearts which in utmost failure can feel that they have not wilfully disunited themselves from God! Their sorrows are as the sorrows of the Man of Sorrows, the sorrows of earnest love, wounded in its sympathies, disappointed in its nearer hopes, but with no bitterness and with no despair.


Let us seek for some of the sources of Bitterness. They are common to us all. No man is free from them, though the manner and the measure of their power is the secret of the individual.

I. Is it too much to say that there is a root of evil in every man, known only to himself? Is it generalizing beyond our justifying grounds if we charge upon every heart some secret sin? Well, if it were not so, we must think that the instinct of joy which is natural to unaccusing hearts, the presence and the vision of God which is the Beatitude of the pure, would more often than it does flow forth in irrepressible serenity, and make earth like to heaven. We infer from the general absence of peace, the general absence of spiritual order. And if a man looks into himself, he knows that *for himself* he could unveil the secret. Each of us could tell the well-known way which the perverted thoughts will take when we are thrown upon ourselves in silence and solitude. Each of us could tell the canker, the miserable heart-

burning, the lost rest in God, the broken reed of self, which often in the watches of the night takes all holiness from the time, and troubles the stillness and the darkness. Is there not some root of Bitterness, some vice, some soreness, some ignoble wound, some infirmity, some unhappiness of temper, which we loathe, but to which we return as slaves, and cannot break our chain? How little does the world know us! And how little do we know the world! We guess neither the loftiness, nor the lowness, of those who are around us. How much of wisdom and of goodness may be united to a weakness and a littleness which theorists would pronounce to be incompatible and impossible! How many grave and honoured men would be covered with shame if compelled to disclose the small things that sting their conscience and discompose their peace! Haman could not possess his soul in quiet as long as Mordecai sat at the king's gate! How many shadows of evil passions, of some envy, resentment, or unmastered pride, haunt our secret chambers and pollute our thoughts! Is it from a childlike trust in the inexhaustible measures of God's compassion, or is it from insensibility to His holy Presence, that we so carefully hide from men what we know to be quite open to *Him*? These bitternesses the heart knows, and God knows; and both know that they could not be if our humiliation had with us its perfect work—if it so taught us to

know our weakness that we took security against our evil, and, escaping from our meaner selves, found our true selves in the constancy of our communion with the Holy Source of peace.

II. There are roots of a Bitterness that cannot be communicated, in the sense of our responsibility both for the character and for the happiness of others. We are all centres of influence—powers of God in the world; and very soon the circumstances of our life—claims for protection from those who come near to us, if they are weak—claims for co-operation in noble service, if they are strong—determine the nature of our responsibility. There is a period in life at which this feeling can no longer be escaped. We know that we are not at liberty to do what we please with ourselves—not even to choose our own paths of service—that there are other relations than those between God and our own souls, and that God, often, it may be, as consequences of our own acts and wills, has charged us with them. It is the peculiar joy of childhood that it is free from such sense of responsibility; it is not yet its brother's keeper; the heavy burden of the world's sins and sorrows it does not touch with one of its rosy fingers. The awful problems of evil and wretchedness break not the unconscious flow of its objective existence. Its thought of God is perplexed by no fear that the dread shadows which rest upon His Providence are all cast by the



guilt, selfishness and shortcomings of *us*, His fellow-workers. How idly do they speak who think that all care and woe, and sense of wrong in later life, is owing to a virtue they have lost, dropped for ever on the sunny slopes where their innocence dallied with joyous nature, lay on the lap of earth drinking in unburdened life from God! No; it is not a virtue which we once had and have lost, but a virtue which had not then begun to assert its claims over us, that makes the difference. The most critical moment in existence, could it be marked, would be that in which we pass out of a freedom from all moral anxiety for others, into the solitudes, obligations and self-questionings of a responsible life, charged not with ourselves alone, but with the virtue and the peace of our fellows. There is nothing in a child's life that a man might envy but its exemption from this—and that not wisely; but in times of failure and disappointment, when those with whom our own spiritual life is in any way bound up seem to be gliding away from all firm footing—when God puts the question, "Where is thy Brother?" and our souls cannot give the clear answer—that we had done our best, and sacrificed all for his integrity, and would have held him up at the risk of being dragged down ourselves—or when we see the souls of men passing to swift destruction, falling into the open pits of the most obvious sins, and reflect that, as they fall, each of them is a witness

to some failure of moral power in their brethren, failure in the will, or in the wisdom, or in the energy to save—then there is a bitterness, perplexed rather than softened by the fact that we scarcely know to what extent we are guilty,—a bitterness which tempts us to think that there is nothing in the crown of our manhood, nothing in our independence or our self-dependence, that we would not **thankfully** exchange for childhood's irresponsible life, when duty ceased and conscience put no questions after we had rendered obedience to the law of another's will.

We know, indeed, that the responsibility which is the source of so much bitterness is also the source of all our nobleness. But to have God's holy Love *for ever* inciting you, and no interpreter of what His Love would have you to do but the experience of your own conscience—to know not how much or how little it demands on behalf of those who are perishing or ready to perish—this breaks the peace of those whose spiritual susceptibility is beyond the measure of their clear discernment, or of their energy of action. In the visions of the night the images of the living, the shadows of the dead, pass in array before their souls, and seem to bear witness against them. This is the characteristic moral difference between manhood and childhood: this makes the sorrow of the one so circumstantial and momentary, the sorrow of the other so deep-rooted in spiritual ground. To these

two periods, of unburdened freedom and of tasked solicitude, might be applied the Apostle's words, "I was alive *without* the Law once ; but when the Commandment came, sin awoke and I died ;" for the life of childhood appears so spontaneous and free because as yet the *spirit* of no law makes indefinite demands upon it ; and the life of man so troubled and full of reproach, because the Will and Love of God, the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, has laid its boundless claim upon us.

It is well that there should be a season when our nature grows out of itself without the sense of oppressive obligation ; yet would it not be well to escape liability to suffering by deferring too long the period of responsibility. A burdened childhood is **unnatural** ; but youth taking no charge but of its own pleasures is of wretched promise, and most difficult is the transition to a true life. The arrogance of enjoyment, the appropriation of so much without some sacred feeling of thankfulness and charge, is indeed to store the roots of bitterness, an infatuated rudeness towards Providence, full of ominous forecastings of the lessons by which Heaven, in its severe mercy, will have to check the unchastened insolence of nature in its animal recklessness and pride.

III. There is, I suppose, some bitterness to all men, a sorrow not easily communicated, in the disappointment which experience brings of their ideal of life.

The dreams of their youth have miscarried. They are not to themselves, nor to the world, nor yet to those to whom they are most, all that was once in their purpose, perhaps in their power, to be. Life dims the hope of a great vocation, of being in some signal sense servants and agents of God, or, even when the aim itself grows clearer, takes its fulfilment from the present, removes the vision to a distance. Necessarily so perhaps, for no true man can equal his aspiration. If a man touched his mark in life, what would it show but the meanness of his aim? It is said of a great sculptor that in his latter days he was found in bitter weeping because in the execution of a work of creative art he had satisfied himself, equalled his own conception, dejectedly lamenting that his exhausted genius had departed from him. That his work was up to his idea was to him a mark, not of the wonders of his execution, but of the degradation of his thought: the hand had outgrown the mind. *Our* bitterness, however, is not from exhausted but from unfulfilled ideals; and if instead of forgetting what is behind in ever hopeful effort to reach forth to what is before, to work his thought outwards into life, a man gives himself a prey to a pining self-consciousness, and sits down not to redeem but to realize his disappointment, he eats of the very roots of a bitterness that is not nourishing.

These secret sorrows are, in some guise, common to men:—some besetting sin; some fear that God may

require another's guilt or misery at our hands; or, far apart from all self-regarding fear, troubled thoughts of those whom we are helpless to save; some failure of our own dream of life; some fading away of visions that once exerted over us a prophet's power; and perhaps we ought to add, some peculiarity of constitution and moral nature which, like St. Paul's thorn in the flesh, exposes us to trials and difficulties into which others have no insight,—even as every man has perhaps some fitness and faculty, some *combination* of qualities, peculiar to himself, which, if he would be content with it, and cultivate it faithfully, would open to him an original career, and make the great distinction of his being.

I pass to some of the secret Joys with which a stranger may not intermeddle—nay, which often cannot be communicated even to those who of all the world are the farthest removed from strangers. Such are all the truest moments of spiritual life, the resorts of the soul to God in joyful or in difficult times. Of the relations of our own soul to God hardly may we speak at all, and certainly not of its joys, lest we speak unwisely or presumptuously, and fall from God to self in the act of speaking. Yet is there a peace which passeth understanding, for it comes direct to the spirit from the Source of life, and has no natural affinity with the severe and trying circumstances which of themselves could not have produced it. “I have meat

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to eat," said Christ, "that ye know not of." Even in the midst of outward failure, a consciousness of communion with God's nature, of striving for ends dear to Him, will bring a confidence of the ultimate success of truth and righteousness, of purity and love, as alone in accordance with that eternal and all-penetrating Life which must in the end conform all things to itself. The holiest feeling of security is not drawn from outward triumphs or signs of coming changes, but from that vision of the soul which sees directly into the Mind of God and cannot doubt. What is a martyrdom, but a great attestation serenely given to this spiritual conviction and insight? Indeed, much might be learned of the highest mysteries of man's nature in the times of its most real contact with its Source, by a close examination of the last hours and words of those who have greatly died. There are many anecdotes of illustrious men passing away by the block and scaffold with strange words of almost playful joy. This is not to be deemed unseemly, far less unnatural: it becomes us to *observe*, not pronounce beforehand as though we had the measure and standard in ourselves, what *is natural* to great spirits when they lay down life rather than break their union with the living God, or defile the temple of His Spirit by any unfaithfulness. The records of their deaths are our only means of knowledge; and certainly strangely cheerful have been the last hours and words of many martyrs, and


often in cases when faithfulness was perhaps loyalty to honour rather than conscious loyalty to God—when the instinct of honour was rather a root than a fruit of religious faith. Not that this is a kind of death which men ought to set before them as something to be aimed at, but that, simply as observers of man, we ought to know and admit that great natures in the moments preceding a violent death can rise into a state of serene thought, when the load of existence is cast off, the burden dropped, and the spirit floats in ether. It is not for us to call this unreal, because it is a joy with which the stranger may not intermeddle ; rather is it of the deepest interest to the most common man that such is the natural action of the immediate approach of dissolution on men of great soul, who witness to a great faith, or are inspired by a great purpose.

Will it be said that such was not the death of the Son of Man? True ; but only because his was greater, only because there was in it a deeper sacredness, a more intense fellowship, than entered into the cases we have cited. They died for the cause they were identified with, at peace with themselves, happy in their own faithfulness. He died serene about himself, but in travail of soul for all the world, full of solicitude for the weak and trembling hearts in whom alone his life survived. The spiritual condition of all around him pressed too close upon the great question of the

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world's salvation, to permit his last moments to take their hue only from the relations of his own soul to God. There is therefore nothing in his death of the joy of one who has thrown off the burden of earth, who was released from the weary ways of men, for his fellowship with humanity forbade all such rapture of liberation; but higher than this was the presence of everything that was true at once to heaven and to earth—"Behold! thy Mother! Behold! thy Son!" "Father, forgive them:" "It is finished:" "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit."

Sometimes Christian mourners seem to know a joy with which strangers may not intermeddle. The more passionate children of earth are tempted to impute insensibility to those whose tears God holds back—to those who from the first had put death and the eternal trust into the contemplation of their hearts, and never afterwards forgot the earthly tenure or the heavenly issue. There is often a light on the brow of bereavement, which the worldly mistake for cold composure. The unchastened natures in whom the natural affections and sensibilities overpower spiritual insight and reflection, do not appreciate, for they do not understand, the quiet of a heart not in subjection to the earthly aspects of trial. Strong human affections in their union with the visible realities of this life so absorb their being, that their union with the invisible realities of God seem to be not so much heavenly as



unearthly and unnatural. Yet Christ indicated the parting benediction which the good leave with us in their hour of death—"If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, for I go to my Father,"—not the warm gladness of the heart, but the sacred peace of the spirit.

All real experiences of God's communion with our nature partake of a joy with which a stranger cannot intermeddle. To speak of them seems to betray a divine secret, to make common the place where the Most High condescends to meet us. At least we cannot speak of such experience until it is gone. Our souls have come down from the Mount before human intercourse begins—and then we must speak of things that were, rather than of things that are—for we are quite alone when we are in true communion with God, and prayer is as solitary as death. So powerfully is this felt, that in the presence of the most expressive symbols of God's Spirit, as in the more glorious parts, or the more solemn hours, of the temple not made with hands, silence is the frame of worship, and to speak is to break the spell. A mind seems light and trivial, untouched by awe and reverence, that can obtrude its feeling when God Himself is finding access to us, and nature melting away into a spiritual consciousness of the Almighty's Presence. So in the most intense moments of their inward life men do not speak to one another their joy, their love, their trust, or their awe : at the touch of imperfect speech we fall

out of our mystic fellowship ; instead of the divine fact we have only its human representation, and a consciousness of the most perfect sympathy seeks no utterance of *words*.

Two great Lessons should remain with us :—one, of the thoughtful consideration which may be due to those whose secret griefs or latent difficulties we do not know, and whose joys, inexplicable to us, we may misinterpret. We are bad judges of the bitterness or of the blessedness of another's life, for we see only the surface even of circumstance, and know not what may be beneath. How often do we judge and condemn as wilful sins the workings of disease that cannot be mastered, and are the fit objects of a deep compassion ! How many does the world deem happy whose hearts are silently breaking ! How many the families that seem blessed with all the gifts of God, beneath the cover of whose roofs are deeper woes, worse foes to love and peace, than death, or pain, or hunger ! How many are the circumstances in which there is nothing so bitter as congratulation, and nothing so stinging as praise ! Why, then, should the tongues of men deal so lightly with the deep mysteries of our joys or our virtues, our griefs or our sins, our merits or our shame, not reflecting how wide they are of the mark, or what wounds they touch ! And why, with the knowledge that we have of ourselves and of our own secrets, are

we all so ready to sit in judgment upon others, as though we knew them through and through, and held them in the hollow of our hands!

And the other great Lesson is, that we prize above all price healthy natures, healthy minds, hearts and habits; and *they* are healthy natures, and they only, that seek communion for *all* their feelings—with man when it is legitimate, but if not with man, then with God. Alas for us if *He* is one of the strangers to whom we cannot tell our griefs, and who does not intermeddle with our joys! Alas for him who has a bitterness within that he confesses neither to man nor to God, but recounts to himself, and hides in his heart; for surely its roots must be in sin, or in worldly discontent, or in morbid self-regard! There is no good reason that the most secret thing that is in us, joy or woe, should not flow out to our fellow-men, except that love for *them*, or sacredness and humility, may stay our lips; and there is no reason whatever that it should not be poured into the bosom of God, to be cleansed and removed, or approved and sanctified, so that nothing shall remain but what the all-pitying Father can take into nearer union with Himself.

XI.

Moralities without the Spirit of Life.



MARK x. 17:

“And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is God. Thou knowest the Commandments: Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness; Defraud not, Honour thy father and thy mother. And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth. Then Jesus beholding him, loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved; for he had great possessions.”

IN studying the Life of Christ, it is most quickening to observe the breakings forth of what may be called his *natural* character, extemporaneous expressions of feeling showing how passing incidents affected him,—connected rather with his involuntary, self-acting temper, with the morality of his heart, the constant climate of the soul, than with deliberate principle, or finished outline, or severe proportion. How much is there in every good man's life the omission of which could not justly expose him to human censure, but the commis-

sion of which adds to his character exquisite beauty, and gives to all who witness it new revelations of his heart! How much more is laid open of our determining dispositions, of the energy of our affections, by a picture of our morality taken fresh from life, a sketch of our procedure in any real emergency, than by the most elaborate development of principles, or the most formal setting forth of moral standards! A separate treatise on the character of each would not tell us so much of the Priest, the Levite and the Good Samaritan, as is brought out by the single touch of light falling on him from the Master's hand: that the one made as though he did not see the wounded man at all; the other looked at him, and passed by on the other side; the third went up to him and took care of him. No statement of his spiritual beliefs, no discourse upon his character, not even his own Sermon on the Mount, will set Christ so fully before us as one action, or one word, from himself at a critical moment: the flood of light poured out upon the Samaritan woman when no one else was by—the defence of the wasted ointment—his lofty silence before Caiaphas—his sorrowful gentleness with Pilate. The difference between this and elaborate description is the difference between a statue and a living man. The statue has an absolute perfection of expression and outline, but fixed and uniform; the man has a relative perfection, assuming free attitudes of grace and power.

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with every fresh occasion, according to the need of the time and the swaying of his heart. Christ's perfectness had nothing of the statue-like: it had no rigid pose of dignity or fear of bending; it was human all over, but with the humanity that trusts in nature and lives in the smile of heaven, as a child that is unconscious of wrong before a parent's face. It was free, flexible, native to the circumstances that required it and called it forth—never below and never above an occasion—at home in the moralities of a juncture, whether it was to protect a child from rudeness, to take it to his arms and bless it in words whose power has shed consecration on every child since born into the world, or to look to God, in sight of the Cross that seemed to close an unfinished work, and say, *Thy will be done!*

We have in the text a picture of Christ's incidental morality, an illustration that may give us no additional knowledge of Christian principles, but that lays bare his very spirit, and we behold how gentle was his heart—how his temper, reflecting his principles, steeped in eternal truth, never lost an opportunity of surrounding a human occasion with pure light, and introducing a man into the kingdom of heaven upon earth. The narrative describes a character of very imperfect goodness, of a goodness that was not yet within the sphere of eternal life, and adds, that "Jesus beholding him, loved him." Even in that there is a touch of divine

reality. For who in the delineation of a Son of God would of his own design throw in the acknowledgment that he loved the imperfect? He loved him, not assuredly for his imperfection, but because beneath imperfections, perhaps intertwined with them, he saw something that was good, some genuine grace of sincerity, some guileless reality; and he could love that, and hope great things from it when the Light touched it, though it was far from perfect and had its promise shadowed by the neighbourhood of evil. And *there* was the broad, wise Charity that spoke the Son of Man, whose trust and patience nothing that is genuinely *human* could dismay or repel—the sympathethic power that made and makes him the Saviour of the lost—the power of detecting the element of goodness in every heart—aghast at nothing but hypocrisy—forgiving every word spoken against himself, provided it is not an insult to the Holy Spirit speaking at the same moment in the conscience, a bearing of false witness against God—a confidence in any *sound* part that is left in a man's inward life, however narrow it may be—a confidence in appealing to it, in using it as a centre from which light may spread to the darkened spaces of the soul, as a station from which to work the spiritual leverage that may lift the whole being to himself. Though in the case of this rich youth the traits of his self-portraiture were open to ridicule and satire, if these had been possible to Christ,

beyond any other sketch of character the New Testament contains, Jesus knew what was in the man and loved him, because, though he was very imperfect, full of moral platitudes and of boastful self-confidences, there was yet a soul of honest goodness in his shallow forwardness, and Christ saw it. There are those, and followers of Christ, who can see the evil, but do not see the good ; and they know not what is in a man, and they love him not. Any eye can discover faults : it is only the good who are never blind to kindred goodness.

There is often a singular engagingness, much lovingness, in characters that have but little of the continual spring of fruitful principle, or of a consistent fulness of action. There is a class of minds of which it may serve for a description that you cannot help being attracted by them, whilst you cannot entirely respect them. Some of them attract us by the rightness and beauty of their impulses, the play and warmth of their affections, though we know that the impulses are excessively irregular, and the affections, if not capricious in their objects, at least very uncertain in manifestation, and far indeed from constant lights of sacrifice and love. Others of them attract us because of a gentle and equable goodness, a sure serenity of peace, even though we know that its sphere is mediocrity—characters whose tender conscientiousness keeps them kind and faithful, full



of delightful repose, in the regularities of duty, but who never put forth an unexpected virtue out of the accustomed walk, never take a new step on the by-paths or on the loftier heights—who keep in the open day and the blessed sunshine, taking calmly and bravely the familiar things that meet us there, though the day should suddenly darken and the sunlight depart, but who explore no tangled thickets and scale no mountains of the Lord,—men of whom you would never say that, since spiritual power was incalculable, and spiritual life of inexhaustible richness and force, you could not tell of what they were capable, or what great things they might do—on whom you might stake your life for all reliable qualities, but whom you would fear to commit to great emergencies in which the spirit must guide itself—of whom you never have a moment's fear that they will go shamefully wrong on a plain path—of whom you never have a moment's hope that they will go exceptionally right, and dare to be greatly good.

Now these two varieties of goodness—the Emotional and the Ethical—owe their separation from each other far more to constitutional accidents than to any difference in spiritual principle or in voluntary self-determination. It is the nature of one of them to be much dependent on his impulses ; it is the nature of the other to be much dependent on his serene affections and his habitual ways ; and neither with

the one nor with the other is there the direct personal introduction of the forces that reside in God, of a standard of character, or a spirit of life, to sustain those impulses when they are good, at the constant pitch of their occasional inspiration—to carry the *sentiment* of those habits into fuller developments in more trustful endeavours and wider ranges of delight. And yet the latter class, the men of habit, are apt to be severe, and in the contrast self-laudatory, upon the former class, the men of impulse; whereas, in fact, the only difference between them is a difference of constitutional temperament. There is in both a common and a radical want. It is a mistake, and a prevailing one, that the children of impulse are peculiarly open to the charge of being unprincipled. The children of habit, though not exhibiting such contrasts, because moving in a smaller range, know just as little of the power of a spiritual principle, of the ever renewed expansiveness of the children of God. The men whose standard never rises, let their level be where it may—whose life never flowers afresh, let its regular yield be what it may—have certainly as little claim to pretend that *they* are the fit embodiment, the full fruit and practical amplitude of a great spirit of duty. No doubt, moral mediocrity that is reliable and stable is for many a practical purpose far more useful than irregular impulse, however high it may shoot, or whatever beauties it may unfold at uncertain times;

and this utilitarian difference will explain their comparative values wherever utility is barely or meanly gauged ; but they must both alike resign pretensions to be the representatives of a spirit or a principle of goodness.

For what is it to have a principle of life and action? It is to have an affection in the *heart*, an aim before the *will*, and to indulge that disposition, to get nearer to that aim, not by doing to-day what you did yesterday, but by any enlargement of sympathy, any strangeness of companionship, any eccentricity of effort, that will only fitly consummate the ends, though the means were never used before, and are a novel machinery of your own creation. He is a man of vital principle who, out of love for the end he contemplates, out of reverence for the right he sees, is ready to do anything that will lawfully serve it. He is without living principle, a plant in a dry ground, however regular his performances, who never inquires what better or more abundant fruit he might have upon his tree of life. The principle of life is a principle of growth : with any living thing, animal, vegetable or spiritual, when it ceases to grow it begins to die ; and the peculiarity of the spiritual is in this, that with it there is no necessity of decay, of ceasing to grow and beginning to perish. Extreme old age is growing as long as it is ripening its fruit, working off the earthly acidity and sharpness, daily perfecting its

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peace, and, now beyond the accidents of blight or storm, waxing sweeter and mellow in faith, hope and charity.

It is one thing to be orderly and regular; it is quite another thing to live in the spirit of any principle of Goodness. And the men of order and method are too ready to believe that they are the patterns of consistency, so that with very many system and regularity are the moral equivalent of a spirit of life; and when they accredit a man with principle, they only mean that he is steady, and that they know where to find him. It is a great and indispensable quality, without which no man is worth much to others or right in the sight of God; but he is spiritually alive, akin to eternal life, only when working in the service of the fountain-springs of Goodness. For, put men into new circumstances, into new associations—mix them up with strange, ungenial people—remove their social fences—render their self-regarding habits, their reserves, their protections against their fellow-creatures, impossible to them—bring them face to face with the world on their personal merits—reduce them to that circumstantial equality with every other man which accident may occasion with any of us, and death will bring to us all—or, without such change, show them applications of principles they avow outside their sheltered walks—ask them to realize some great good by intercourses and by methods that gall their social

prejudices and involve some present awkwardness—nay, only strip their goodness for a time of all popular countenance—let the world's respect or gratitude disappear—let no hearts bless them and no man smile on them—then would it be seen whether they have a root of spiritual growth, and can save their souls alive ; or whether in any real sense they are destitute of principle, and suffer custom, timidity, caste, pride, habits, to be the masters of their being.

Something of this was in the character of the rich youth whom yet our Lord loved, seeing how genuinely he believed in himself, and how ignorant he was of the root of evil that was in him. His heart was very gentle ; his habits were very correct ; his spirit was not alive. A conscientious observer of the formulated moralities, he never suspected that he could be weighed and found wanting ; for we are told that with the alacrity of confidence he came “running,” and kneeling down with the forward reverence of one who expects to be approved and blessed, giving honour whence honour was to come, he asked our Lord, “Good Master ! what shall I do to inherit eternal life ?” The meagreness of his soul was laid open by the first words Christ spoke to him, if he had understood them ; but if he had been capable of instantly understanding them, he never would have asked the question ; and since he could not see at once that the all-perfect God was the only spring and measure of

goodness and everlasting life, our Lord put to him the very elements of duty, and then appealing to their principle, led him upwards to the truth. "Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is God. But if thou wouldst enter into life, thou knowest the Commandments"—purity, humanity, justice, truth, personal honour, filial piety, brotherly love. "Master! all these have I observed from my youth up." And now came the test. Then get at the *heart* of the Commandments, and do its bidding. Leave the stale forms of goodness, and let its principle bear ampler fruit. Love is the fulfilling of the Law; give Love the life that will now best serve its spirit. "Go thy way; sell whatsoever thou hast and give to the poor; thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow me. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved; for he had great possessions."


Now it would show but a shallow insight into the springs of character if we were to content ourselves with saying that the love of riches was the root of all this evil. That, indeed, was the rock on which he happened to split, but he would equally have split on any other stone of offence, on love of ease, or of station, or of pleasure; and this was rather the occasion of showing his weakness than itself the root of his weakness. Any other requirement equally new would equally have betrayed in what a narrow round

of observances he lived and moved and had his being. What, then, did his character want? He had moralities enough. "All these have I kept from my youth up. What lack I yet?" He wanted what so many want—he wanted an informing spirit that would drive this traffic for eternal life out of the spiritual courts; he wanted the understanding that it is eternal life, the soul's fellowship with God, that draws us to measureless good works, and not any measure of good works that is the purchase-money of eternal life; he wanted the spiritual discernment that our Father's service is perfect freedom, not task-work nor duty-work to be performed as exercises and repaid with rewards, labours and sacrifices in which we have no delight counted out to God as the price of a paradise in which self-denial is to cease and effortless joy begin, but the lifting up of our hearts towards perfect goodness, and the reaching forth of our hands, or the cutting of them off, at the irresistible bidding of truth or love. He wanted a temper that worked not *for* Heaven, but *in* a heavenly spirit; that worked not as a servant for wages, but as a son for fellowship, seeing that the Father of us all cannot be served by any works of self-seeking, but only by those who work as *He* works, blessing and doing good; that this alone shapes the forms of duty; and that so to know and love God as to do this is to *have* eternal life, and to grow in it for evermore. Christ exhibited to him eternal life in one

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of its living manifestations, in one of the fruits of its spirit ; but it was strange, it was not in his forms ; and what would have flowed freely from the soul's trust and love, could not be wrung from prudence computing the price of salvation, and he would not do it.

The nature of the particular requirement which was made the test of life is a point that by no means claims our chief attention, except, indeed, so far as it is itself an illustration that the forms of goodness are for ever changing in order that they may the better serve its spirit. To sell all that one has and give it to the poor may be very bad political economy to-day ; nevertheless, it may have been heavenly wisdom then : and to spend what one has in the spiritual interests of the poor, throwing it all, and ourselves with it, into a common fund for that purpose, as the Apostolic age did for a season, is quite a different thing from giving it in kind to the poor, for their material maintenance in exemption from honourable service. It is not necessary here to defend Christianity against a charge of weak economic science. A word from St. Paul will do that : " If any man will not work, neither shall he eat." Political economy is competent to instruct me what I am to do with what I have if I mean to grow rich, but not what I am to do with it if I mean to do *right* and to grow in eternal life ; for then, and with her consent too, for she makes no pretensions beyond her province, I may freely part with it all, if only it



makes others rich in priceless blessing, and relaxes no nerve of their moral strength.

Original methods and walks of sacrifice were opened in those early years of Christianity when all things were becoming new. It was a period of transition; and the new spirit that was come into the world must find its own ways and make its own means. To go with all that one had and take a place of equal brotherhood with the untaught and the poor—to spend it in their spiritual service—to find in this kingdom of love and heaven the true riches of the soul—to bear any hardship such service might encounter—to take the Cross itself as the earthly badge and symbol of those who would spend and be spent for the eternal life of men—to do this in the name of the Son of Man *was* the best way then of serving God and the interests of God for that time and for all time after; opening to all the fountain of inspiration, never to be closed again, so that the waters of which he that drinks shall thirst no more, should flow by the common road of life on which the wayfaring man must pass. Surely, if ever the living heart of Goodness should have been ready to extricate itself from its old habitudes and adopt the methods and estimates of Heaven, it was when Jesus invited an eager youth who professed to be seeking eternal life to take up the Cross in the name of God's fatherhood and man's brotherhood, and, leaving all else, to follow him.

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The occasion was peculiar: not so the feebly-pulsing heart, the spiritual decrepitude even in a youth, the flaw in sincerity, that proved unequal to the occasion. These are still losing for us all the new occasions of God that every day presents. How seldom do we take it home to us that eternal life is the life of the spirit of Love—of a love that, human or divine, if not conscientious, is nothing—of a spirit that is never for one moment without new opportunity, whether we are working for others or living with them, and whether its expression, according to the occasion, is a kind word and a kind look, as when Christ blessed the little children, or the cross on which the Master died! How apt are we all to fall back on our Moralities, and plead, “All these have I kept from my youth up! What lack I yet?” And if one in the Master’s spirit was to open to us some quite original way of sacrifice, with Love for its clear light, but with thorns on the road and crosses, not gardens and waters, by the way-side, would there be no tendency to shift away from the new soliciting—to pretend, nay strive to believe, that it was visionary—to smile it down or to frown it down—and, if that failed, to go away grieved because we too had great possessions, great possessions in the quiet ways of life which we could not bear to leave, even though our Lord had called?

We shall be able to take every way of eternal life that Love opens to us, when Love is really the ruling

spirit in us—when we work, not for heavenly wages, but from the kingdom of heaven within. We shall then go through strait gates and narrow ways, and take up every cross, not because these things entitle us to rewards, but because they meet us on the path which Love must pass along. The rich youth—the thirst of whose soul for eternal life his moralities did not altogether satiate, for his question was perhaps some indication of a spiritual unrest out of which at last loftier sacrifice, a freer self-surrender, a purer desire for goodness and for God, might come—from the want of that leading spirit, could not accept a plain direction from the Master at whose feet he kneeled: the Master himself, because he had that spirit, could find room in his heart, weighted as it was, to love that faint-souled man who was grieved to do wrong, though he could not yet do right.

There is nothing we ought more to desire than the power of separating from our life the spirit that should mould our life, so as clearly to discern how far that spirit is unclothed, how far we are from having put on the Lord Jesus.

It is true that this great power of Love is not a matter that is immediately at our own command. We are not responsible for the quantity of it that God has naturally endowed us with, but only for the conscientiousness that cherishes and fulfils what we have. It will grow, if we will let it bear its fruit. Different

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types of Love there will always be. Passionate ardours, enthusiastic affections, mighty fires of impulse, a man does not create for himself. God asks only for what He gives. Yet we can do much, of our own will, to concentrate the warmth of our nature, and when we are musing the fire will burn. Some are born without the force of feeling that carries others into rapt devotion towards God and measureless sacrifice for man. If Love, then, is indeed the spring and the beginning, for Conscience itself cannot act until Feeling presents it with something to choose and to act upon,—since we cannot commence before the beginning, it might seem that we were spiritually helpless where Love was naturally weak, and that the vast spiritual differences among men were simply matters of original endowment. But the *spiritual* difference of men is not in natural affection, and is not in genius, widely different as these are, but in the Conscience and in the Will, and *these* are responsible for cherishing and for sanctifying the constitutional materials of feeling and of perception that God has given. Whether a man is marked by nature for a Spiritualist or a Realist, a Mystic or a Moralist, a Saint in soul or a Hero in action, an increasing volume of Love will find its channel in any of these courses, if the Will is pure and true. Nor, if the spiritual forces are faithful, will these forms of Love keep separate; they will tend to pass into one another and kindle the whole nature to a glow; for if “the end of

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the commandment is Charity," it is not the charity that has sympathy for everything and moral indignation against nothing, but "charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned."

The Love that is rooted in Conscience and in God, living daily in the works that are as its daily bread of life, will every day grow richer in inspiration and expression, and make itself and all things new.

XII.


No Supererogation in Christian Service.



LUKE xvii. 10:

“So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.”

IT is essential to a constraining sense of what it is “our Duty to do,” that the expressions of character should be felt to emanate from principles that admit of no discretionary obedience; that the lighter, higher or finer graces, which seem rather spontaneous than obligatory, should, when distinctly contemplated, be seen to rest, not on a basis of sentiment, but on a basis of conscientiousness. We are apt to count as ornament, superadded charm or drapery, styles and forms of Goodness which to a truer discernment would appear *necessary* products of its essential spirit; and so the few grand roots of perfectness, instead of fully flowering in our nature, issue in moralities that are rather of a civil than of a spiritual order, whilst all beyond is regarded as of a voluntary decorative character, or classed with virtues of imperfect obligation.



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Many of the clearest claims of conscience, of the most legitimate fruits of right-mindedness, are thus stripped of the binding force of Duties, and referred to some vague sentiment whose demands have no authoritative enforcement. It is not seen that the utmost *beauty* of Holiness is rooted in the very nature of Holiness, inseparable from a *dutiful* obedience to the simple requirements of its spirit. Perhaps the most remarkable example of this tendency is the manner in which men narrow the claims of Justice, and whilst overlooking all the finer suggestions of her spirit, yet escape from themselves, and from the world, the imputation of unrighteousness. We often assume to be acting from loftier feelings partaking of the nature of Generosity, whilst in fact we have reached only to a most slender appreciation of what simple Justice would require. We confuse our ideas of Goodness by supposing that it springs from a great variety of *sources*, some of which are more essential than the others, and that it has a great variety of forms, some of which are works of supererogation, moulded by an unsubstantial sentiment, the absence or the violation of which involves no forfeiture of righteousness; whilst in truth all possible goodness, the moment it is distinctly conceived, takes the obligation of *duty*, and consists simply in being true in action and in feeling to the full claims of the relations in which we stand. Justice, to one who discerns what on all sides is due from him, in his

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indebtedness to God, covers the whole ground of Righteousness, and of more than is ordinarily comprehended in Righteousness, of spiritual perfectness and the beauty of holiness. All the sensibilities of our nature are of use only as they become feeders of our fuller sense of Christian obligation : until they are this, they are wasted and abused, failing to accomplish that for which they were given. The utmost graces of character are, after all, nothing more than the actions and offerings of a just spirit fairly meeting its obligations—obligations which not to discern is of the nature of spiritual blindness, and when discerned, not to honour and discharge is of the nature of wilful sin. There are men of iron conscientiousness, who never evade a known duty, but deficient in delicacy of perception, in sympathetic observation, in quickness and range of moral feeling, in spiritual promptings, who would be and do more, if only they discerned that more was involved in the legitimate demands of Righteousness ; who, if they did not spontaneously flower into moral loveliness, would at least do their best to perform its outward deeds, if only it came to them in the shapes and with the claims of Equity. And there are others, men of sensibilities, who are habitually abusing the finest opportunities of life, the clearest claims of the affections, without discerning that in so doing they are ceasing to be honest, failing to meet the just demands of the relations they assume. The former

require that their conscientiousness should extend to gracious impulses and suggestions of goodness to which they are now insensible : the latter require that their sensibilities should become conscientious : *both* require to see that the beauty of holiness, the utmost grace and charm of life, as only the adequate responses of a clear-sighted spirit to equitable claims, can be no more than that which it is "our Duty to do."

Take the relations of Piety : the duties of man are the rights of God—debts of the spirit—that rest on a basis of conscientiousness the moment His real claims are understood. It is our personal relation to God that makes the suppressed premiss of the Apostle's reasoning, "To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin." Be what we may, do all we can, we are but unprofitable servants in the sense that we have done no more than that which it would be unrighteousness not to do. We have but used talents, not our own but entrusted to us, for purposes which were the conditions of the gift—conditions not outwardly enforced, but morally existing, and assuming a character of absolute obligation the instant they are perceived. Our lives are not our own ; our powers are not our own ; our breath is not our own ; we righteously hold them but for the ends of Him who gave them : not to employ them for *His* ends is the abuse of a trust, and to employ them *against* His ends, to turn a gift against its Giver, to

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use the breath of life in disowning and dishonouring Him whose inspiration it is, is not the less injustice because it is impiety. When a man once opens to a consciousness of the purposes of God in our personal being, of the spiritual fellowship and co-operation which is the end for which we are inspired by the Almighty's Spirit and upheld by the Almighty's power, then he is bound to those ends not by gratitude or aspiration only, but by simple justice : no distinction can be recognized between what is spiritual and what is moral in his obligations ; in no way is it possible to conceive how he could more dishonestly violate a right than by wilfully refusing to fulfil God's holy claims upon his nature ; and the offence is not the less against natural honesty because God is supernatural. In truth, to a spiritual man, to a man with whom the living God makes an integral part of every interest he pursues, of every question he considers, there is no assignable difference in the binding nature of Religion and of Morality ; they both consist in the willing conformity of life and spirit to the full demands of the relations we discern. All that we have is God's, given for known purposes, which our hearts and souls approve ; and to pervert them to *other* purposes seems as plain unrighteousness, as manifest violation of a trust, as any that human law in human relations has the power to define. It may be said that man did not solicit the trust ; but he

holds the gifts. In the language of the parable, he retains his Lord's money. There was a naive discernment of clear justice in the passionate advice of Job's wife—Renounce God, and *die*; as though in common equity annihilation must deliberately be accepted by one who chooses to thwart Him by whom we live. It is true that the duty of pursuing spiritual perfectness does not come alone in the form of debts due to another. We have our own nature to honour, serve and glorify; all God's claims come in the form of Beatitudes; He is no outward creditor; He is within us, inviting us to do justice to ourselves; to accept our own blessedness in acknowledging our debts to Him; but all this only enforces the *righteous* claim, and leaves us without *excuse* if we turn away from that which is at once God's right and man's privilege. It is the function of all such inward movements and perceptions, of all such echoes of God within ourselves, not indeed to set up a dreamy or fanciful standard, but to quicken and adorn the great principles of godliness, to convert affections into duties, duties into affections, so that the deepest and richest suggestions of heart, mind and soul, shall make authoritative, irresistible demands on the Conscience and the Will.

And from our divine if we descend to our purely *human* relations, still the richest or the most graceful virtue is but equity—truth of life expressing truth of discernment—and any failure in such expression,

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according to the proportion of our discernment, is not imperfect Goodness only, but the violation of recognized Duty.

Take the primal relation—of the first man to the first woman—justly held to be the most binding, beyond the ties of blood, because determined by ourselves. In our necessary human relations we but accept what nature provides for us : this we elect for ourselves ; in this, therefore, personal responsibility is at its height, personal fidelity absolutely plighted. Divest it of every colouring but that which cannot be taken off without violating conscientious honour, and the demands of Justice, covering the whole ground of sentiment, stand out in the nature of the relation as clearly as if they had been specified in the terms of a contract, and are not so specified, not because they are not of an equitable nature, but because they are too refined in spirit, too large and subtle in variety, to be embraced within the cunningest form of words,—and because Equity itself declares that what derives its essential value from being freely rendered, would in its very nature be destroyed if reduced to contracts. There are *debts* which, though they are paid on the asking, so far as then they can be paid, it is yet the grossest injustice to be compelled to ask for—when the necessity of asking destroys their value, turns enchanted wealth, the mintage of the heart, to dross and refuse. In the primal relation—the only per-

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sonal relation that is absolutely voluntary in that family life which is the true unit, the ideal representative of society itself—the two natures are designed by God each to complete the other ; and each undertakes, with no vain confidence indeed, but in good faith, according to the measure of the gifts that are in them, to supply nature's wanting complement, with such a reverence for personal rights as will preserve each from limiting the free development of an independent being. They are each the other's share of whatever is good in the contrasted natures of each, so far as they are contrasted. In this they undertake to make one another's earthly futurity, and close their mortal destiny. The *possibilities* of human life are then so far exhausted. These are the conditions of equity in which they stand, each pledged to represent their own side of human nature, and each, in a unique relation, closing against the other all nearer participation in the richest ministries of life than that which themselves supply. Then, is there any unrighteousness that will compare with unrighteousness here—any dishonesty like that which robs the injured of their peculiar share in human nature itself—which takes the one chance, and kills it—which takes the place that God made for one who will give help, grace and strength—and fills it with a form which it becomes impossible to honour? For it is not happiness that is the indispensable necessity in this or in

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any relation, but honour, truth, reverence and trust. In this relation, at least, nothing that we have to give can be of the smallest value unless we can give also a confidence in our nobleness and truth—a character that a pure nature may trust and cleave to. And where this is necessary to satisfy the essential idea of the relation sustained, its highest fulfilment can be no more than the discharge of debts. This is not to confound sentiment and feeling with a sense of justice: it is to say, that sentiment and feeling when at their height will show their reality in this, that they enlarge to their own dimensions our conceptions of that which it is our bounden Duty to do.

Descend to the next relation—that of Parent and Child—and trace the claims of Justice. Once you have entered the region of moral life, the instincts are but the quickeners of higher sentiments that make parental devotedness on the one hand, filial piety on the other, obligations of righteousness. The parent designedly incurs the most sacred responsibility—has, in fact, solicited God to lay it upon him—and if not accountable for their constitutional capabilities—though it is impossible to say to what extent he is not so—is accountable for his own dedication to the direction and formation of minds united to him by self-sought and imperishable ties. We hear parental fidelity placed among the highest virtues; and if this means that it is an indispensable virtue,

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it is so far true ; but the horror that all men feel at the absence of it—the infamy of an unnatural parent—shows that the violation of parental duty is most shocking, rather than that the discharge of it is most excellent. When we speak of the great virtues, we surely mean something that average men may want without being consigned to indelible disgrace. Parental fidelity is not among the great virtues in that sense, for a man cannot want it without being disgraced—and that cannot confer peculiar distinction the absence of which brings peculiar dishonour—which is in fact the recognized duty of all men in whom nature is not outraged. It may indeed be discharged in a manner that raises it to the rank of a great virtue, when in the subordination of affection to principle, of instinct to reverence for the highest good, Love becomes Sacrifice ; but this will be found only with those who feel that all self-surrender, all self-purification, all denial of pleasure, however innocent in itself, that is not compatible with the faultless performance of offices they have chosen to sustain, all efforts to adorn and perfect human nature in themselves for the sake of their children, when carried to the highest pitch, amount to no more than being simply true to the just demands of relations of which they have invited and assumed the obligations. Deep affections may sweeten and bless these duties, but they also define them—that in their utmost height

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and depth they are no more than duties—that those who do the most do nothing that righteousness could spare, and are unprofitable servants in the sense of doing only that which it is their Duty to do.

And there are the corresponding equities to be revered by the child, even if he has ceased to be a child and has become a man. The parent has his claims of Justice—not so much for love, or gratitude, or personal affection—not so much for unfailing respect, a thoughtful care, and tender deference—these are great—debts always owing, always remaining to be paid—yet they are minor. His great claim is, that his labour to make an upright man be not cast away, that he be not dishonoured in his own offspring. Is it *just* to have received everything, even life—to have known the long years of anxious thought—to be the object of lesson, prayer and sacrifice—to feel that all this was done, not for their blessedness, but for ours—and yet to start aside through selfish passions and break the hopes that have centred in us—to destroy the peace of those whose peace is in our well-being—to overthrow the image which gave its highest purpose to existence, the fall of which is like casting them down from heaven, the image that is broken being indeed the image of God in their child? If a man *could have* only himself to consider, no Father in heaven, no parent on earth, no friend, no brother, he might be supposed to have a right to do what he pleased

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with himself, even to give his own soul to perdition. But he knows that he cannot do this without the deepest wrongs to others, without destroying just expectations sown in the dearest soil and with the most precious seed. Suppose a man to have the right of sinning against himself, a contradiction in terms, even then would it be conceivable that he could have the right of blighting the existence of others who have deposited their own life within his? We understand a man being carried away by passion to the injury and abuse of his own nature. An impure man will for the time obliterate his soul; a lover of ease and present pleasure will throw away his own natural gifts and God's special opportunities; but a man who has no care for himself incurs his deepest condemnation, in that he has no care for others, and most of all because he can strip the relation of a child of all that is sacred in it, and make the relation of a parent one of unnatural wretchedness and anguish. No one can fail in even the highest observances of filial piety, without in that measure making the springs of life to become springs of poison, turning back the course of nature.

Once more : a grand idea of Justice, of the magnitude of that which it is their Duty to do, should animate the conscientiousness, and so sustain the self-respect, of all orders of that great toiling class who, if they are without the sense of work faithfully per-

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formed, have nothing else wherewith to dignify their life. For there is *no* profession which in material returns pays for its anxieties and toils, if it is not exalted and sweetened by the sense of uncalculating Duty rendered to God in the ungrudging service of mankind. If all that men get out of it is the sustenance of life, more or less ample, it would be better to revert to the rudest simplicity of nature than to endure for such an end the complicated cares of our present civilization. Every profession has some idea of service at its basis, in a lofty devotion to which all its better members find their justification and reward. In some such sentiment is the dignity of every true life, the nurse of its perfectness, and the spring of its contentment. And every earnest man in all professions must find this sustaining sentiment in the consciousness of faithful work, of doing out without abatement that which it is his Duty to do, a faithfulness of which men reap the benefit, but of which often from the nature of the case God alone can be the witness. The early religious sculptors, preparing themselves for their task by prayer, by communion with the saints, by meditation on unearthly beauty, would put no imperfect work out of their hands, even when so placed that it could not possibly be seen; and when questioned why the concealed parts of statues, removed from human sight, should be so exquisitely wrought, said that the eyes of the angels were

there. Their own eyes were there, and they loved their work for their own thought of it, not for what men would say of it. This love of perfection, for perfection's sake, in imitation of the workmanship of God, is the secret delight and sustaining strength of every worker whose faithfulness is great. Every stroke of conscientious labour justifies his spirit, works out his salvation, lifts him to the rank of a spiritual labourer ; for often failures in fidelity cannot be detected by any practicable inspection ; and when the dishonest work shows itself at last, the dishonest workman can no longer be discovered. In this respect the righteous labourer who never spares himself in bringing his work to perfection, is truly a spiritual man, inasmuch as he works, "not with eye-service as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart fearing God." By perfect work conscientiously performed his life is hid in God, and with *Him* he lays up testimonies to the righteousness of his spirit in all those cases where no eye could detect a flaw in the work, a dishonesty in its performance, until it broke in ruin, and then the doubt would remain whether the fault was in the material or the man. How many of the most constantly recurring forms of disaster and distress, consuming spiritual elements of time and strength—how many of the most dreadful forms of human calamity—in sudden exposure to pain and death, the burning dwelling, the sinking or flaming ship, the exploding engine, the breaking car-

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riage with its freight of life—may be direct though remote results of dishonest workmanship! There, in woes and losses that admit of no valuation, may be the fruits of some workman's unrighteousness,—in that he did not deliver his own soul by doing all that it was his Duty to do. These are consequences which, it may be, more conscientious labour, another stroke of the hand, a truer adjustment of the eye, would have prevented coming into existence. And are these results of dishonesty to come to the light in such agonizing shapes, and the dishonesty itself for ever to hide in darkness? Are a man's unrighteous works to be thus awfully manifested, and the man himself never to know it, or be known? Impossible! These, too, are laid up in the memory of God; and the man who, for the sake of saving himself, in carelessness, or fraud, or self-indulgence, has left the work of his hands imperfect, will surely have to meet the look of all the woe that has ensued, and know his own unfaithfulness to be its cause. And this holds equally of the unfaithfulness of all professions. What unstayed evil may lie at the door of the educator, of the statesman, of the producer, the trader, the lawyer, the physician, the preacher, of the servant, of the master, because they did not love perfect work, because they did not accomplish themselves for perfect work, because they did not do that which it was their Duty to do, we shall all one day have to know

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We cannot examine the other relations of life to show in detail that when we have done our utmost we have barely met the claims of Justice—we are unprofitable servants—we have done no more than that which was our Duty to do. Truly the ancients were not without large reason when they called Justice the queen and mistress of the virtues. We may seize the principle here evolved, and apply it to all our relations with God, and to all our intercourse with men : we may come to see that the highest virtue is but simple conscientiousness,—the highest heroism, the gentlest courtesy, the most Christian grace of spirit, no more than a true recognition of what is due to God and man ; that no piety can overpay our divine, that no charity can overpay our human debts. There are no mere ornaments which, being within our contemplation and within our power, it is a grace to have, and yet no disgrace to be without : there are no free-will offerings which it is a merit to make and yet no demerit to withhold : it is impossible in any direction of grace or of goodness to be without failure in positive Duty, if we neglect to attain to that which our hands might touch if we stretched them as far as we might. And this is not to divest our nature of its sentiments, and impulses, and free, suggestive Love ; it is to *use* these ; to make them the enlighteners of Conscience, enlarging its bounds and deepening its authoritative voice ; to identify their most gracious

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suggestions with the clear demands of Righteousness, which to violate is to fall from the class of the merely unprofitable servants, and sink to the level of those who knew their Lord's will and did it not.

This is a doctrine that may perhaps lower our sense of human merit ; but, if it does this, it will do so by the highest tribute that can be paid to human nature, by enlarging the measure of what is expected from it, by raising nearer to God the character of its work the standard of its aims.



XIII.

Christ's Sense of Brotherhood.



MATT. xxiii. 8:

"All ye are brethren."

THE essence and the bond of human fellowship is identity of nature before God. "Have we not all one Father? Hath not one God created us?" No spiritual relationship can be separated from a living recognition of its natural consequences. We cannot claim kindred with God and evade its legitimate inferences and expressions; the penalty of neglect in the consequential duty is growing blindness to the spiritual reality. By considering the fulness of their natural outflowings we invigorate the great spiritual sentiments which are the fountains of life in us, or we become aware of the stagnancy in which we suffer them to be.

It follows from our Brotherhood that the smallest justice, the poorest charity each of us owes to man, is that we should interpret human nature through the best that in ourselves we know of it—that in our estimation of others the known mingled good and

evil of our own being should suggest to us the unexpressed and concealed good that may co-exist with any evil that is prominent. A man who thinks meanly of human nature must think meanly of himself, or else deem himself above human nature. A man who distrusts human nature must distrust himself, and proclaim that the specimen of human nature he is best acquainted with he knows to be false and hollow; else he must deem himself an exceptional being—peculiar and eccentric product of the race, or of another order altogether. It is thus that a cynical distrust of our nature, an habitual imputation of low motives as the solution of apparent nobleness and magnanimity, attributing to Satan the works of the Spirit of God, incredulity as to disinterested goodness, is either the self-consciousness of abject life that has so long given itself up to the lower conditions of feeling and of action, that it has quite fallen out of the range of the higher,—or else it is absolute inhumanity—an isolation, and denial of fellowship with mankind—that swollen and Pharisaic insolence which knowing some good of itself and believing no good of others, claims a separate rank. This is an extreme case; but something of this arrogant, self-isolating temper enters into most of our severe judgments of men; so that the Charity even of the tenderest of us is perhaps not so much as our simple Justice would become, if all whom we condemn had but the fi-

and righteous benefit of the pleadings which our own self-knowledge ought to suggest.

Let us consider, in this light, the two classes with whom mainly it is difficult, in spirit and in truth, to hold the ties and sentiments of a full Christian Brotherhood: first, with the Uninteresting; secondly, with the Repulsive.

The peculiarity of the first class is simply negative,—they excite no strong feeling. Now, if we separate the few whom God has endowed with an inexhaustible freshness, this is in fact the case with all men, except in their intermittent states. And yet there is no class more exposed to the hard neglect of mankind than those who only are permanently what all of us are, except occasionally—in their isolation from sympathy—in the wounds they suffer from indifference or contempt—in the deprivation of the genial stimulants and encouragements which they especially need—and fearfully, though unconsciously, are they avenged in the barren inhumanity they introduce into those who turn from them with carelessness or scorn; for it is impossible to have such claims constantly before us, and constantly neglected, without an induration of the heart.

What is it that makes so large a class incapable of exciting strong interest? Chiefly, I suppose, their want of power to *manifest* strong interest; and if this be so, then those who are most richly blessed with the


power of feeling and exciting sympathy would do well to remember by what a slight change in their nature, in their capacity—it may be, in their opportunities—they might be reduced to the same helpless condition, if they were to be dealt with after the same measure. Examine those who are consigned to indifference. What are their characteristics? For the most part it might seem that nature had denied them the *forcible* qualities of character, talent, energy, wit, richness and play of mind, the powers that make us useful and exhilarating, or the powers which make us formidable to others. We must not make Goodness one of their necessary deficiencies, for often the most unselfish Goodness is in those who find themselves totally neglected, only because through some infirmity they want the faculty of expression. But why is this, or any class, abandoned to indifference? Only because they do not come into our sphere—to co-operate with us, to stimulate us, to cheer us, to amuse us, or to overawe us, and hold us in salutary check—and so they fall out of our selfish regards, though we might enter into their spheres, bringing with us in our contrasted qualities the very stimulus they need, or in our gentleness and gentleness the atmosphere of ease and of encouragement, which perhaps alone had been wanting to educe in *them* qualities finer and more delicate than our own.

And to show the ordinary inhumanity of this neg-

lect, we have only to remember what circumstances will often dispel it, without any elevation, moral or intellectual, in those who have been exposed to it. Suppose the inherent deficiencies in vivacity, in energy, in wit and humour, in all profitable, or exhilarating, or formidable properties, to remain as before,—but add station, add wealth, add the power to distinguish, the power to give and to bequeath,—and there is no more danger to the dullest mortal of forgetfulness or indifference. And this may be quite apart from any direct birth of selfishness, or from the smallest expectation of personal benefit to ourselves; it is only that they have come within the region of our sympathies; for let the inherent incapacity, with all the uninteresting deadness or *dumbness*, remain, but add some positive interest of mere *condition*, add the pitiableness, or terror, or excitement of an apprehended exposure to some great suffering, and the object of indifference may speedily become an object of intense solicitude, of moral cares, hopes, efforts, and of that strong personal interest which soon attaches to any one for whom we make sacrifices, for whose welfare we are earnest.

But the special inhumanity consists in drawing a line of separation between ourselves and others only because they seem stricken with barrenness; only because they want more than others the refreshing and awakening which gifted spirits can impart to

slower natures ; only because they want more than others a generous sympathy to keep off the withering sense of a despised existence ; and in our rude forgetfulness that the qualities we miss in them, because they show neither flowers nor fruit, may yet be deeper rooted in them than they are in us—retarded for a time by the Hand of God laid for purposes of His own on the mere outward conditions of development, by some uncongeniality of position, or even by fineness of texture, and waiting only for their season, freed from the providential and temporary hindrance, to make a growth of beauty and of vigour that will reverse the relations between us. For we cannot doubt that there are fearful retributions of this kind awaiting us all ; fearful, not because of the outward changes and re-allotment of ranks, but because of the shamed self-knowledge that will then unmistakably be forced upon us, the remembrance of former hardness and neglect towards those we might have cheered and perhaps quickened, who then will touch us gently and forgivingly with the light of their brighter gifts. That many a despised being, despised for the very reasons that ought to have marked them out for special tenderness and regard to all gentle and thoughtful natures, will eventually soar above us, and have to condescend to us in the very properties and walks wherein we supposed our superiority to lie—though condescension will not be their feeling—is no more



than a little self-knowledge might have suggested to us all, and spared us the remorse that then may break our else generous joy when we come to witness so fair a compensation. For every man has felt, or ought to have felt, how much the development of what is best in him has been affected by Accident ; meaning by Accident something that we could not from ourselves have supplied ; that Accident has fostered it ; that Accident might have chilled it ; that a change of circumstance, without altering the essence or capabilities of our character, might have altered all its manifestations ; and that the freest, the happiest, the most serviceable exercise of our nature may so depend on kindness, on sympathy, on expectation of good from us, on the genial encouragement of those with whom we live, or for whom we work, that if these were withdrawn we should at once collapse upon ourselves.

It is in these directions that it is most necessary for us to be reminded of what the spirit of Christ would suggest and enjoin, if it possessed us entirely with its fine Justice, Thoughtfulness and Love. In these days it is not so necessary to enforce the obvious expressions of human fellowship, to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to instruct the ignorant, to seek the lost, to reform the sinner : these are lessons which, if a man does not hear, he must wilfully stop his ears. But there is a class which is neither hungry, nor ignorant, nor perverse, nor criminal—which utters no cry,

and excites no alarm, and makes no importunate appeal—the obscure, the neglected, the unhonoured, the uninteresting—who have dropped out of the ranks or fallen behind in the race of Life, to whom a refined spirit of Brotherhood would bind us in most gentle fellowship, not assuredly as if we were condescending or even conspicuously helping, but rather in loving reverence before God, fulfilling our own humanity in a sense of our common dependence upon Him from whom cometh every good and perfect gift, whose touch may draw the richest melodies from natures hitherto all-silent and untuned, and sink into insignificance the most splendidly endowed in comparison with those who before were the least distinguished. It is in these directions that we hear the finest whispers of Christ's spirit ; and if we hearken to its stiller and finer tones, there is no danger that we shall be deaf to its fuller voice ; if our hearts are alive to its gentlest dictate, they will not be dead to its plainer requirements ; if we reverence and follow it here, it will lead us everywhere else whithersoever it ought. This is one of the cases in which he who is faithful in that which seems the least will be faithful also in much ; for if we so chasten our nature as to catch the finest suggestions of our Christian Brotherhood, we cannot close our ears to its louder cries, or harden our hearts to the more conspicuous duties which it proclaims from the house-tops.

Look now to the remaining class with whom it is most difficult to maintain the full sentiment of our Brotherhood—those whose peculiarity it is, not that they excite no strong feeling, but that the feeling they do excite is one of repulsion and antipathy,—and seek to qualify our rude, impetuous estimate by the justice of self-knowledge. I suppose that no faithful reporter of what actually passes within himself, none but a mere theorist of some imaginary and symmetrical human nature, would be forward to deny the possibility of much good co-existing with a predominant evil, or of much evil co-existing with a predominant good. And even where the evil is uppermost for the time and has outward expression, a faithful reporter of himself might truly declare that even at that moment it was not the strongest element in him ; that its seeming indulgence was accompanied with an inexpressible bitterness from the consciousness of degradation in its outbreak ; that far other powers were the actual lords of his nature, judging him with an acknowledged supremacy when to all other observers only unqualified evil was ascendant ; that at his worst times what he appeared to be did not come from the real desires and innermost complexion of his spirit, but from the powerlessness of his will, from the long tyranny of habit, which will keep us in ways that we detest, or from the difficulty of finding in natural expression some outward flow for the *whole* of our being when in a state of conflict.

It is difficult for one who has acquired a fixed reputation to appear other than he has been, even after he has become totally changed—difficult for a child in a household, difficult for a man in the world. A heart may be vanquished with relentings, ready to overflow with penitential love, but the kind of expectations it has long excited so determine the treatment it receives, that under a sense of injustice, shame or hopelessness, it finds expression impossible, and the better nature retreats more and more out of sight. And every one knows that his own evil does not always appear to himself in the form of evil ; that, unlike the rest of the world, he stands, not before it, but behind it ; that he sees it through all its originating circumstances, which, at the worst, can give it the character of a natural virtue, justified in its spirit, if not in its form ; and that there needs but some guileless moment to betray the deception, and make our hearts quite open to confession. Most men who act unkind and cruel parts, injuring and suppressing their humanity, do yet, through some disorder of the moral eye, behold themselves in fair and equitable lights—nay, often believe that they are acting upon some high view of Duty, voluntary witnesses to righteous Principle, when they are involuntary slaves of selfishness or spleen. And though this is not to be used to excuse any man's evil, yet surely it is to be used, if we would not utterly deny our Brotherhood, as a qualifying medium through


which to see into the real life of others. Certainly we should not have much confidence in that man's self-knowledge who has not learned from himself that it may be that mankind is not so much vicious as disordered—their conscience not so much wilfully bad, as blind, misled, perverted and false ; or who does not know in his own life sufficient evil co-existing with yet abounding good, to render credible, under certain unhappy conditions, all the evil that is in the world. When we see our own evil, we know also the good that accompanies it, and so qualifies it that it seems to lose the essence of evil ; but when we see the evil of others, we give them no credit for the good that has no expression and is hidden from our sight. We paint them as we see them, though a moment's introspection would tell us that such spiritual portrait-painting would do a gross injustice to ourselves, and that what we see is often but the mask of what we do not see. There is one remarkable fact which is quite decisive : the great Seers and Masters of human nature, who reveal the secrets of all spirits, never depict a man in such totality of evil, that even the best, when introduced into the inner workings of his being, cannot enter into some shuddering sympathy with him. They take us behind the appearances ; they show us the complicated perversions of his heart, the disordered lights through which he looks at things, the circumstances and the provocations that have deranged him,

and utter disgust is displaced by a fearful pity. The worst man becomes less hideous when he is known. We understand how such things may be, how they lie within the compass of nature ; that the seeds of such passions and positions exist in ourselves, and might by possible circumstances have been brought to a head ; and being what now we are, if we perceive that we could have fallen to such depths, we must also perceive that we could have been raised from them again. It is only the popular caricaturist who paints for vulgar effect with coarse colours, and knows not human nature, who ever creates a monster—whom the gentlest and the best cannot understand through mysterious sympathy and the dreadful possibility of fellowship. It was hence that Aristotle said, that the mighty Dramatists purified human nature through terror and through pity—terror for ourselves lest we should fall into a like case, pity for those who have so fallen. And in forgetfulness of this lies our inhumanity, when we separate ourselves from Brotherhood with the evil. More *self*-knowledge would bring more justice, and more justice more of fellow-feeling ; and we will not even commence this process by using the mingled good and evil we know of in ourselves as a means of revealing to us the latent good that may mingle with the evil that is prominent. The ascending scale of our own reverence and love towards those who are far above us, farther perhaps above *us* than we are

above the lowest, might remind us that possibly those below are aspiring even to our poor place—that we are all of us on one ladder, and that on whatever step of it we stand, to all who are but looking upwards the ascent to God and the highest is for ever possible and for ever going on. The relation of the lowest to *us* may be only our relation to those who are far from the highest ; and if so, though the stages are different, the way and the goal are one.

The sentiment of Brotherhood, if we are to maintain it in its fulness, requires us to place first in our regards the gifts and properties which we have in common with all mankind, and to subordinate to these whatever is accidental. It is thus only that each *class* can correct the biases of its own position, and meet in natural equality on the ground of that common humanity which is the inexhaustible inheritance of us all. It is thus only, through a profound consciousness of the spiritual elements in our nature, that the mutual approach of classes can be a spontaneous result of the meekness of wisdom, and that through each contending against the undue bias of his outward lot, through the dignity of the Lowly and the humility of the High, the Almighty Father of All, not by angry judgments, but by soft attraction, can put down the mighty from their seats, and exalt them of low degree. That which distinguishes *every* man is the vast dower of our nature, permanent and eventually

the same to all—not the passing accidents of station, fortune or talent, which are mere surface varieties. Men may in some respects be separated for a time—and, for intrinsic discipline, rightly separated—by differences in rank, power and sphere of occupation, and yet feel that the basis of their being is the same ; but these demarcations, however necessary for the spiritual purposes of God, fail to answer those purposes when those whom they socially separate cannot retain through the difficulties of their contrasted positions the full spirit of their Brotherhood. And in truth what is it—in things that are not spiritual—that makes the distinction of the Great? Set apart *the nature* that is common to us all, and what distinguishes the great ones of the earth? Nothing but the workmanship of the lowly : these make their trappings, their ornaments, their luxuries. Strip them of these, and they are reduced to common men. And if one man makes what another man only wears or uses but could not make, which so far is the more distinguished? Or, what makes the knowledge of the learned but a surplus of that time which the lowly, for a daily maintenance, must spend in his service? These are matters which God can easily balance; and He will do it speedily. He does it at every grave. But it must never be forgotten that this sentiment of Brotherhood, like all spiritual instruments, is a two-edged sword, and that it turns the same keenness of



spiritual demand upon the low as upon the high. *They* forget their Brotherhood, and their God, and the inexhaustible riches of their humanity, when they feel degraded by their position, to the full as much as do the lofty when they are puffed and swollen in their pomp. It is surely as vile treason against our spiritual nature for honourable Labour to feel envious and humiliated in the pompous presence of ostentatious Wealth, as for Wealth to indulge some pride of place in presence of the humble Poor. The eyes of neither are towards their God: both have fallen from the high estate of their humanity, and become the slaves of their condition.

But the chief value of regarding all that is in ourselves as common to every man, is in the power it gives of intimately knowing the various experiences and trials of mankind—of realizing, through sympathy, facts, wants and feelings removed from direct observation, and known to us only through our knowledge of that nature which is the property of us all. By far the largest part of the inertia, the insensibility, the moral indifference of the world, arises from an incapacity to realize the positions where the want exists, and our help might interfere. We are not so much hard, or even careless, as we are dull and slow to understand. It is not so much that we disregard the evils which we see, as that through remoteness of position and the inaction of thoughtful, imaginative

sympathy, we see them not at all. Every one has had experience of how absence and distance blunt sensibility—how even sufferings and wants of which we have the most intimate knowledge, to which perhaps we have daily ministered, can begin to grow indistinct when place interposes its screen. There are men who now do nothing, who lose not an hour of the day, not a watch of the night, through their care for human sufferings, who if they saw with their own eyes the things that are, would pour out their wealth like water, and know no rest until they had removed the horrid image from their thoughts. The bearings of a lively and prompt imagination upon the active virtues are often of vital import, making all the difference upon the affections, of the presence or of the absence of their exciting objects. The moral imagination of *childhood* is proverbially quick and true; it realizes the human feeling under differences of position; and the natural sensibility, uninjured as yet by a caste education, has not been blunted by selfish resistance to its pleadings. And this is one of the faculties of childhood to which we must return and be converted, if we would enter into the kingdom of God. For this kind of imagination comes mainly from a sensitive heart—it is the result of fresh and simple feeling—and we are shorn of our humanity when, through deadness of sympathy, we have no access to what our nature is feeling, wanting and suffering in the



various conditions of life. And this barren inhumanity may exist without either distance or absence: it may exist towards members of the same household: it may, and it does, exist towards those who serve our daily wants, to an extent that more than any other familiar fact shows how poor we are in spiritual accomplishment—how little we have the power, through grace and simplicity of heart, and the insight of sympathy, to overcome the small difficulties of contrasted position.

Our common nature makes us one with all men, and gives the power of entering into all men's hearts. High or low, rich or poor, happy or unhappy, pure or guilty, learned or ignorant, we may know their inmost being, and hold the key of their spirits. And accordingly he who was the full image of that nature was reproached by those in whom it was maimed, by the spiritually halt and blind, with being the Friend of Publicans and Sinners. It was one of the many cases in which intended insult redounded to his glory, and thorns wreathed in mockery crowned him as rightful Lord—the universal Sympathizer—who knew what is in man—Son of Man and Son of God, because in him the elements of humanity were all present and all reconciled, fused into the image of Him who spoke and wrought within him.


XIV.

The judging Spirit.

MATT. vii. 1 :

“Judge not, that ye be not judged.”

ALL men exert some power of praise and censure, and have a circle whom they influence. All therefore are capable of affecting the reputation of other men, of directing the moral sentiment of society. And when it is remembered what vague rumours create reputations, prepare the way for favourable or unfavourable judgments, predispose for moral impressions or stand in the place of them, this power of influencing opinion, which is exercised by every one, will be regarded by a man of any conscientiousness as among the gravest of his responsibilities. A man's fate in life may depend upon this floating reputation, which no one is accountable for. Men will, or will not, look to him with expectation, with a view to his filling important offices, on account of impressions which have no certain foundations, but which have become a sort of general feeling, though produced only by one light tongue echoing another.



Such in its relations *to others* may be the importance of regarding our power of affecting Opinion with some sacredness, with a heart that suggests the fear of doing wrong, and shrinks from the committal of so great an injury. In its relation to *ourselves* the matter is even more solemn ; for there is nothing more fatal to every kind of excellence, to every grace of thought or feeling, than the habit of needlessly judging other men—the habit of forming and uttering sharply defined opinions respecting the invisible spirit that dwells in a man. Even if the justice of an unfavourable judgment was absolutely certain, one might suppose that all earnest and gentle natures, under no necessity of duty, would recoil from giving it form, from lodging it in the minds of others, from shaping a bad reputation for another with their own lips, and giving it currency with the intent of their hearts. But when we reflect on the uncertainty of all such judgments, on the profound mystery that attaches to every man, on the hidden depths, the latent workings, the possibilities unknown of every human spirit, the presumption that volunteers a judgment, as though that solemn and inscrutable nature was a mere transparency, ought to repel and shock us, as partaking of profaneness and impiety.

And *favourable* judgments, uttered praise, if more amiable, may be not less arrogant. The self-ignorance betrayed, the amount of worthless or misleading opi-

nion put into circulation may be equally great. Men, for instance, of the most restricted reading, totally ignorant of the literature of any department of thought, will not hesitate to style a man original, if he has enlightened, or surprised, or agitated *their* minds, making their own ignorance a standard of judgment. He indeed has judged *them* by showing a power above them, by fathoming their minds and adding something to their depth ; but for them to judge *him*, to fix his place, to assign his merit, is by necessity of the case quite beyond their province. To acknowledge, and that warmly and gratefully, the mental benefits we are conscious of receiving from other minds, is just and natural ; but this, when modestly put, is a judging of ourselves rather than of *them*—a confession of our relation to them, rather than an attempt to fix *their* relation either to the general human intellect or to the great masters of Thought. But it is the *spirit of judgment*, whether right or wrong, the attitude of mind which it implies, that is necessarily poor, enfeebling, ungenerous, injurious to modesty, injurious to progress, placing us in false and presumptuous relations to both God and man. Let us follow this spirit into some of its manifestations.

I. We do not hesitate to judge those whom God has placed in a condition, the effects of which on character and habit we have no means of correctly estimating. We apply the ready standard of our own

notions to all orders of men. Our condemnations are often only instinctive repulsions, class differences, sentimental antipathies, arising out of conventional accidents. Either rank, the very high or the very low, when far removed from our spheres, out of our experience, out of our sympathy, is alike subject to the unjust judgments of an uncharitable ignorance. Thus we misjudge the poor when, looking on their modes of life, our sentiments are shocked, and we attribute to *them* the moral debasement which might be implied by the voluntary introduction of such habits into our own spheres. But all this may be a mere difference of external refinement, an accident of education ; and when we judge it severely, we fall into a Pharisaism of our own, attributing impurity to the *inside* of the cup, because the outside is coarse or plain. For there are many things that pain the eyes of a refined class, that do not in the least hurt or stain the souls of the exposed class. Under the smooth surface of wealth and easy manners, there may be more of that known violation of Right which constitutes *sin*, more of what corrupts man's nature, of impure thoughts, of mean ambitions, of low cares, of sickly desires, of worthless interests. It is extremely difficult to judge of the amount of *wrong* that attaches to any case,—not merely of how far mitigating pleas may be found in temptations and modes of life, but of how far evil or sensuality may be of a kind permanently to injure the

spiritual being. For what we call moral evil is not to be confounded with personal sin. We must look on the sensuality of the poor, and on the wasted or corrupt life of the rich, sinning against knowledge, with totally different eyes. The one goes the way of nature without consciousness of wrong, therefore without permanent detriment or deprivation of spiritual power. It is the natural man going through the experience of outward evil, without inflicting positive wounds on Conscience, without contracting habits of resistance to the higher guidance of his own spirit, without knowingly placing barriers between himself and God. May there not in this be something to compensate for the difference of external refinement, and even of intellectual culture, and all that amount of positive instruction which being slighted and abused only makes men just subjects for God's judgments? Here are two classes: the one by necessity of circumstance seeing much of evil without feeling it to be sin—making acquaintance with it without the sense of guilt—exhausting it—draining it of all novelty or excitement, whilst yet the moral and religious feelings lie in the background, slumbering in unreached depths, and have not their power spent, their authority destroyed by ineffectual struggles, by faithless yieldings and impotent protests. The lower nature is running its course, eating the forbidden fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil without knowing that it

is forbidden, traversing the whole field of temptation without any feeling of sin, ere yet the diviner mind has awakened; and when at last it shall feel the touch of God and come forth, may not the outward temptation have used up its strength and exhausted its resources, and the new-born spirit, freed from its spent solicitations, and with a vast energy nurtured in hardships, surrender itself without restraint and with an infinite joy to the fresh life that then has opened upon it? It may go far to compensate for differences of education and of external refinement if it is possible that with *the lowest* evil may be known, and have its power exhausted, and yet *sin* not be contracted. With the other class, the instructed, the refined, the educated, there is no personal experience of evil that is not accompanied by spiritual debility, by violated consciences and broken self-respect, by positive disobedience and fear of God; and there are no untried faculties of soul to be yet called forth, no virgin powers in reserve, new instruments of salvation with an unworn life before them. And who will say what may be the progress of the class that now appears unprivileged and exposed, when once the eyes are opened, the soul touched, the race of knowledge, love and holiness, entered upon with the freshness of a spirit just baptized into unknown delights? Robust powers, if with an untaught yet with an unenfeebled conscience, when God has once stirred them with His Spirit, may soon

outstrip the poor lassitudes of the instructed who have sinned against knowledge, lost confidence in their own souls, and pass life in weakness and indulgence with unavailing compunctions. We are speaking of possible issues of God's Providence—of what may be hereafter the relative places of those who have abused privileges, and of those who had not the privileges to abuse—of those who sinned against knowledge, and of those who knew evil without knowing sin. The first may be last, the last first; and when we judge the outward form of coarseness and indulgence, we may be invoking just judgment on our own inward sickness, infirmity and faithlessness—on the poor fruits that have been ripened *in us* under so much of God's richer culture.

II. And even supposing actual sin in the case of the exposed man, still judgment on it proceeding from us may be a condemnation of ourselves. What should *we* have been in *his* place? What was his education? What sounds and sights greeted his young sense? What were his parents? Were they gentle, tender, wise, devout, earnest-hearted? Was there prayer in his childhood's home? Were order, beauty, love, purity, incitements to goodness, diversions from evil, instruments of knowledge, all around him? Or was his whole existence compressed into animal sensations, and his home a mere provision for nature's coarsest wants, with no appliances besides? Were his natural passions stimulated by abuse, pro-

voked by unsatisfied cravings? Shall we merely look at ourselves and at him, and pronounce judgment according to the differences now observable in modes of life, knowledge and conduct? Shall sin in *him* be weighed in the same scales as sin in *us*? Or shall our *respectabilities* entitle us before God to as high a place as he may win, notwithstanding actual sins? When opportunities are compared, who will be certain as to the balance of merit? A saint's life in one man may be less than common honesty in another. From *us*, whose consciences He has reached and enlightened, God may look for a martyr's truth, a Christian's unworldly simplicity, before He will place us on a level even with the average of the exposed classes. We do not consider what God may be expecting from one of *us*. We perhaps think our lives at least harmless. We do not consider what He may think of them, when compared with the invitations of His that we have slighted, with the aims of His Providence we are leaving without our help, with the glory for ourselves we are refusing and casting away, with the vast sum of blessed work that daily faithfulness in time can rear without over-work on any single day. Here in one class are men whom light is seeking at every access, yet they are worldly, selfish, sensual, afraid of death, and utterly unwilling to lead the simple lives of God's children upon earth; and here, in another class, are men, sinning too indeed, and sin-

ning against knowledge, but whose whole existence is a series of temptations in a condition nearly destitute of intellectual, or social, or devotional excitements: shall the first class judge the last without feeling that it is invoking the judgment of God upon itself?

We do not at all say that *circumstances* make virtue or excuse wrong, if circumstances mean the external surroundings of a man. The doctrine is vile and lax; the plea of all sin, that temptation beset it. Of course, else had no sin been possible. The spirit of a man must direct, or resist and subdue, circumstance, and there can be no plea admitted against any distinct utterance of conscience. But if we undertake to judge *others*, we must remember that difference of circumstance does often carry with it this other difference—whether or not we have heard any Voice of God distinctly speaking to us—whether or not we are self-condemned before Him as knowingly resisting His Will.

III. In our common life the judging spirit places us in a hard, unfriendly attitude towards both God and man. It is essentially opposed to that genial temper which receives the blessings that come, without anxiety to fix their exact place. If we are to judge everything, nothing will be enjoyed freely, nor taken for what it is, but comparatively and with a grudging reference to what *might* be. The multitude of our blessings will but excite in us the temper of

calculation, as to whether they are not less than necessary, and how they might be augmented. Our friends will awaken the discernment of their defects rather than of their merits, of their heart-goodness. Some accidental blemish will kill an essential excellence, and a critical spirit chill the impulses of our hearts. This spirit condemns itself—it is ready for judgment only because not immersed in a love and activity of its own, to which all such exercises would be alien. It is said that men of genius make the most indulgent of critics, and the reason is obvious: that when creative minds turn to other men's thoughts the simplest suggestion quickens their own fertility—the smallest spark kindles their fervid nature—and they reflect the glory of their own genius on the poor materials over which they were musing when their native fire burned forth. So is it with all really good men: they are not willingly critics of other men. If evil comes before them and forces them to accost it, they can judge it, when necessary, strictly and truly; but judgment is not their natural work—it is to them, as it is mercifully said to be to God, "His strange work"—their thoughts go with their sympathies—their interest is in the light they are seeking, and not in the length or the denseness of other men's shadows. Contrasted with this judging spirit, there is a happy, genial, modest, receptive frame of mind, open to all influences that come—

not slighting what a man is because of something else that he is not. It takes whatever of good any one can give, without the spiteful return of defining the other good things that he has not, and cannot give. It is open to men as it is to God—ready to entertain angels unawares—thankful for such benignant influence as they have the power of breathing—willing to receive of everybody's fulness—eager to judge no one.


Unfortunately, to this mellow, grateful and gracious cast of mind, the tone and temper of common society is constantly applying an irritating treatment. This calm, candid, uncritical, thankfully receptive frame, a man cannot preserve without setting his face against a multitude of questioners. We are daily tempted and solicited into rash and self-fettering judgments. The mental interests of society are too few to suffer personal character and faculty to remain uncanvassed. Conversation runs on *persons* rather than on things, and you are directly asked for an opinion. Great evils come out of such questions. In the first place, you may have no opinion, nor be entitled to have one. Your opinions of men slowly and silently grow up in you ; and scarcely has this process begun when you are suddenly asked to define them. Yet it is probable, such are our habits, that you will not have the simplicity to resist the snare. You will be hurried into precipitate judgment—mere first impressions will

be hardened into permanent conclusions—you will presumptuously speak of the deep inner nature or unknown capacity of a man from slight and insufficient hints—you will commit yourself to some defined view of him, and never again have the free privilege of open, candid, receptive intercourse unbiassed by your own rash judgment. There is a rudeness and irreverence of nature in thus assuming to judge any man. It is a barren attitude. When we have once judged a man, we have as it were closed his access to us at all unexpected avenues. We are pledged to one view of him—he is no more an infinite possibility to us—we have measured him, calculated our expectations from him, and never more can look to him with the freshness and reverence of an undefined hope. A man that will do this towards a child has closed his heart against much that might enrich it. A sage will listen with an interest approaching to awe to the revelations of a child's heart. He is often judged by it; but judges not that pure, infinite, mysterious depth. And so should it be, as far as possible, with every human spirit. Why should we be asked to try it with our measuring-lines? to say how deep or how shallow it is? Why should we not keep the privilege of Hope, which is so very near to Charity—the power of approaching with an ever-fresh expectation, which it would be well for us should exist even in regard to the most common man? Without this there can be

no such thing as respectful and genial intercourse in life. The habit of society in these things is in fact a constant subornation of rash judgments and an irreverent temper. To look upon ourselves as standards of measure is to cherish smallness, presumption and contempt—to lose that simple freshness which is ever willing to receive without judging.

We are now speaking of the temper we should cherish towards the really vast and unfathomable spirit of every man, in opposition to the shallow temper of judgment and irreverence; and not at all of what may be necessary on special occasions when we have to select men, or to aid in selecting them, for special functions,—and to that extent judgment, the best we can form, becomes a duty.

IV. The judging spirit, with the injustice it leads to, often displays a remarkable ignorance of human nature which would certainly be corrected by something more of self-inspection, and of that generosity towards others which a thorough knowledge of one's-self always excites in a just mind. We have a law of symmetry which we persist in applying to others, with a latent consciousness—which ought to be a full consciousness—that we could not stand its application to ourselves. Flaws in us are but flaws, because in fact we know that they do not destroy all nobleness in us; but when they appear in other men we apply our rule of consistency, and conclude summarily that the rent



goes down to the very depths of their nature. Thus a man is often charged with the positive presence of all the vices which our moral logic thinks to be involved in the indulgence of some one passion. But human nature has not this kind of consistency, of rigid symmetry, either in its good or its evil. There is often much virtue in co-existence with some ungoverned passion—much refinement, and purity of mind, and grace of character, in conjunction with some strange infirmity—which “*the judging spirit*” would pronounce to be incompatible things. Now, no doubt in all such cases spiritual symmetry is broken, and our quick perception of this in regard to another should have its moral action on ourselves in extinguishing in us whatever is essentially inconsistent with the moulding spirit of Christ’s mind. But who could apply this as a rule of judgment to other men, without being self-condemned, if measured by his own rule? Who does not know things of himself, which if he knew of other men there would be some danger of all his respect for them vanishing away? Who is not conscious of some infirmity, some low indulgence, some turn of temper, some form of evil spirit, which does not destroy all grace or goodness, but which he can hardly think of as adhering to another, without its infecting his whole character and tainting him to the core? We take the vice, or the infirmity, as a sample of the whole man, knowing that it would not be a just sample in our

own case. How different from Christ's merciful discernment would have been our clear, sharp, consistent judgments on Peter's denial, on Nicodemus's fear, on Martha's household mind! We should have sketched them according to the law of uniformity, and so have involved ourselves in our sentence.

In the same way we misjudge the symptoms of character, little knowing what deep-seated causes there are in the hidden nature for many things which appear to us as manifest iniquity. We presume to judge what we do not know—what we do not understand—and we speak of a human being, fearfully and wonderfully made, as if the inner mysteries were all open to our eye. And just as many men, with no competent insight or sensibility, will approach great poets and complain—complacently complain, as if they were injured—that all is darkness, that they receive not an idea and understand not a word—so, even in our own homes may there be minds presenting dark sides to us, all whose shadows are cast by ourselves. We have not penetrated to the fine spirit of their being—their capacities we have not guessed—their sympathies have escaped us—their wants we cannot meet—their sweetness we cannot gather. We judge *them*, little knowing that all would be right with something more of largeness and insight in ourselves. Our own deficiency we perhaps could not directly supply; but we could approach every

human being with some reverence, and rescue ourselves from the narrow spirit of judgment.

V. There is one large part of our subject which I can only name: the habit of judging of the whole spirit and inward life of a man from the religion he has embraced. Creeds separate, as if the souls of men were of different natures, and one God was not the Father of all spirits. Some men connect all the piety of the world with the peculiarities of faith and worship which they believe to nourish it best in their own case. Can anything good come out of Nazareth? In one from Nazareth they will not be able to discern plain facts—they will not admit the positive evidences of goodness and piety, of humility, and clinging faith, and devout lowliness of heart. They will deny their genuine character, rather than acknowledge that they could come from such a source. And so we close our hearts against one another, and imprison our own spirit, and forget how much the living God is more than a creed—in how many ways He works—and how near He is to us all! The kingdom of heaven is within. What are all differences when compared with the oneness of our common nature, made in the one Image, and fed from the one Source? *All* Christians feel alike the yearning after perfection—the tending towards Him whose Spirit ever draws them—that God is a very ready Helper, in whom we have access to hidden strength,—and

that the Son of Man, living on earth the life of a true and trusting Child of the Heavenly Father—humanity reconciled to God—is the divine solution of the problem of our being. Are there any Christian graces which this faith is not adequate to produce—any peace or consolations which it might not breathe? “Judge not, that ye be not judged;” and judge not even when you are judged.

I have not spoken of judgments that proceed from evil dispositions, from mean suspicions and distrusts that betray the nature of their source; but rather of those which arise from a want of nobler interests and sympathies—from a deficiency of large and generous life engaged on higher things. Keep your hearts so full of the Spirit of God, of love, hope, faith and kindred activity, that you are freed by necessity from the spirit of judgment and contempt. Keep no vacant chambers, empty of better things, for such evil spirits to flock to for their revels. This is the great salvation—to pursue the Good so purely that *Evil* loses its interest for us, that there is no time for it in our lives, no place for it in our hearts, so full are we of another spirit. There is a vast deal of small regulative wisdom that is of little or no concern to those who are right within, at the fountains of their life. They renew their communion with God’s Spirit—they do the work of their Father—they are children of Him “who is good to all, who causes His sun to shine and His rain to

fall upon the just and upon the unjust"—they are disciples of him, 'the first-born among many brethren,' "who came into the world, not to judge the world, but that the world through him should be saved."

XV.

The Morality of Temper.

JAMES i. 20:

“The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.”

THE means of doing good is the most difficult question in Moral Science. It branches into two—the first occupied with the mixed philosophical and moral consideration of what it is good to do, the second with the purely spiritual and practical consideration of the manner and spirit in which it is to be done. Our concern at present is with the last, which for the sake of distinctness we may call “the Morality of Temper.” I shall endeavour to establish a principle, and make application of it to some special cases.

Every one has observed how even a genuine Benevolence can fail to accomplish what it intends on account of something unhappy in the *manner* of the act. In Character, however, there is little or nothing of mere *mannerism*, of what is entirely outside, having no real connection with the state of the spirit; and the marring manner has its origin in marred and imperfect feeling. In all the action of Character the

expression and its inspiration are in very close relations to one another : they are correspondingly full or feeble, gracious or ungracious. The absent manner shows the absent *mind*; the inadvertent manner the inadvertent mind ; the inattentive, unobserving, discourteous manner the self-occupied, self-important mind ; the blunt manner the blunt sentiment, not wilfully rude but actually graceless. Now, when you enter upon an act of Beneficence, the thing *obvious* to the person you design to benefit, is not the fountain of kind feeling which suggested the act, for that is hidden in the heart, but the style and manner of performance, for these are the outward and visible signs of the inward and spiritual grace. From these he receives his impression of the *sentiment* of your act, and if these are faulty or wounding, you may raise a set of feelings which will render impossible any serviceable reception of the proffered kindness, or any delightful return of gratitude, and so rob your own deed of all its intended value. Nor is this unreasonable : whether you mean to bestow a fortune, or to correct an error, nothing but pure Love will make either obligation palatable. A man may be excused for mistaking kindnesses for injuries, if they are offered so as to gall his sense of independence ; or for distrusting the purity of your solicitude for his faults, if it breathes no tenderness into your methods of correction. We cannot suppose there is oil upon the waters if their surface is in a

tempest ; and if Kindness disfigures its own countenance, it must not expect the heart of Love within to be visible through the mask of irritation. There may be much, almost everything, of the genuine sentiment of heartfelt regard, but there is also a mixture of something else which, mantling to the surface, presents that repulsive aspect with which it is hard to associate the belief, and which never will work the effects, of pure goodwill. For a man is never irritated except when he has a personal interest concerned ; and the prominence given to the personal interest in the act of irritation is fatal to the purity of his power as a benefactor. For example : to help out of a difficulty, to draw out of a disgrace, one who is socially connected with yourself, and by the manner, the temper of your act, to raise the belief that you do so, not from care or love for him, but because his loss of standing or of character would reflect on you and yours, will only extend to him an evil power over you which, so little will he feel bound to you, so meanly will he think of you, he will not scruple to use against you for his own convenience. The extent to which he thinks we would assist him, rather than be socially disgraced by him, becomes simply a fund upon which he can draw, and, however disguised, is pure evil both to him and us. To give spiritual weight to helpful acts, they must be purely benevolent : so far as they are seen to be not self-sacrifice, but self-regard, will their power for good

be vitiated. How many of us may be complaining of ingratitude, who are only reaping what we sowed, and deserved no returns but what we got ! Kindness, pure from all selfish taint, may be combined with the deepest *sorrow* or moral distress ; but, so far as there is irritation, it is always the breaking out of a personal annoyance, a self-regarding disturbance. Grief over another, though unreasonable in its extent and sorely oppressive to him for whom it is felt, may yet be purely disinterested, but irritation never. The unhappy manner, therefore, which is in fact the sign of only a *half-cordial* benevolence, the expression of a real reluctance to bear certain painful accompaniments of our goodwill, *screens* the hidden kindness, and calls up a host of ungenial feelings to disturb the cordial and co-operating *reception* of the kindness ; and with these two evil operations it is evident how, even in its mildest form, "the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God."

But something more is necessary to the power of doing good than a conviction of our pure goodwill. This is the clearing of obstructions ; and, except for the gratitude which is raised by kind intentions, which is itself a good, the work remains to be done. The only *real* benefits are those which are conferred on the mind, on the power and action of the affections. It is only *character* that is capable of being essentially and permanently blessed. He is a benefactor indeed

who contributes to a favourable influence on the independence of the spirit, on the force of manly honour and self-reliance in the struggle of existence, on the life of the intellect, on the simplicity and unworldliness of the heart, on the rectitude of the will. He alone leaveth an immortal impress of his goodwill. He worketh indeed, and for ever, the righteousness of God. But *character* can be benefited only through an inward elevation of our tastes, joys, pursuits, pleasures and directions—through a growing delight, or conscientious interest, in the energetic exercise of inexhaustible powers; for the powers that delight in truth, and the powers that delight in goodness, are without limit, either in themselves or in their objects. The method of a real improvement, even when we are being corrected and chastened, is never by restrictions, but always by an accession of fulness, through the increased activity of some neglected grace or faculty in us. If a man is ignorant, it is not by exposing the disgrace of his ignorance, or even by exhibiting its disadvantages, but by stimulating his natural love of knowledge, that you will do him good. If a man is rude, it is not by resenting his rudeness, but by making him sensitive to gracious kindness, that you will win him to be courteous. If a man is selfish, it is not by rebuking his narrow-heartedness, nor by bluntly asking him to give his goods to feed the poor, but by awakening in him some spring of living sympathy and

compassion, that you will make him charitable, with the charity that profiteth his soul. If a man is marked by over-prudence, it is not by lessening his prudence, but by enlarging his love, that you will make him wise with the wisdom from above. He who would bless our intellectual nature must win it to think—to know something of the earnest life of a mind worthily occupied—must encourage it to trust itself and go out upon its own wing, notwithstanding that we are as liable to fall in learning to soar with the mind, as in learning to walk with the feet. He who would bless our affections must call them out, stimulate their natural hunger and thirst, help them to worthier attachments, and leave them, not miserable in the consciousness of their degradation, but kindled and erect with the new love he has inspired. Whenever any accession has to be made to Character, Sympathy is the fountain we need to open. *Attraction* is the working power of the Mind's activity and of the Will's rectitude. All the signals of invitation must be hung around the pursuit we aim to encourage. Every association of mortification is a fetter on the timid intellect, a shadow on the repulsed heart. The effect of man's wrath, whenever it mingles with any of the agencies of Character, is to burden them with an unnatural painfulness. It appeals to none of the leading springs of action. It offers Good with a menace if it is refused, but inspires no love of it. It is a creator of antipathies,

and even blessings are disguised and distasteful when coloured by its frown. This, then, is our principle. By the excitement of ungenial feelings against himself, and against the good he offers, "the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God."

I shall instance the cases to which this principle applies in the order of their increasing connection with general interests ; and first to the case of Education.

It is in childhood, when we are most the creatures of impression, the victims of accidental, arbitrary associations, conjoining in thought things that are always presented to us together, whether they have any real connection or not, that chiefly ought to be dreaded unhappy or repulsive feeling uniting itself with anything that is to be in close relationship with all our after being. In later life, taught by large experience, we gain, more or less, the power of separating enduring blessings from their temporarily painful accompaniments ; but what does a child know of troubles and sorrows that are blessings in the making, except as troubles and sorrows ? It cannot see the fruit in the seed, the future in the present ; and if things really good are made to it the sources of unhappiness, it will and it must revolt from them. Just in proportion as the reflective nature is too feeble to know the value of intellectual discipline or endowment, to abstract forthcoming invisible results of future power from the present pains and restrictions of the educational process,

should there be every care to remove from that process all avoidable discouragements, and especially that wrath of man which assuredly is never farther from working the righteousness of God than when it darkens the life and embitters the remembrances of childhood. Injuries, never to be repaired in this world, have been inflicted on the intellectual character through antipathies produced by this arbitrary addition of fear, humiliation and suffering, to all the rest of the difficulties that beset a child's step on the path of knowledge ; for thought cannot work freely when the spirit is timid or humiliated. Yet this is not the worst result ; its affections are the chief sufferers. There is nothing on earth more melancholy than when the shadows of hard, unfeeling Authority fall in dark masses on the springing life of childhood—when the tyranny of Temper stamps on it the correspondent vices of slavery, the servility, the terror and the trick—when irritability is felt like a jarring blow through and through the tender organization, striking down the spirit of joy and trust, even, as some one has expressed it, as if a stone was suddenly cast against a tree wherein the birds are singing. The birds will sing again when the fright is over ; but never again will the music of a child's heart be given out as freely to one whom it has learned not only to dread, but to distrust, as capable of being at any moment unjust and cruel through mere Temper.

The most blessed change that has come upon the

world in our modern days is in so far as, through the genial sympathy and earnest self-government of parents—for without the self-government the sympathy is only careless self-indulgence—childhood has been sheltered from the immoralities of Temper, from an ungenial Rule ; and the power of a loving imitation, of a free attraction, has had its natural way. For a prevailing sense of unhappiness, and, what is far worse, of injustice, may be produced by unkindness, apparent or real, by tyranny, by uncertainty, by caprice and wilfulness, by the lawlessness of power and authority, by a self-indulgent arbitrariness, a rude, impatient, overbearingness, wounding and stifling a child's affections, or self-esteem, or just expectations, that will give a chill to the sensitive nature, with a rooted moral distrust, which no after effort of the will is able to remove. Nor is this strange. The whole world of childhood is but a small range, and within that range it comes to see things with a very true eye, to receive impressions that go very deep into the real characters of those who rule it ; and if fear, or uncertainty and moral distrust, with an acute perception of a parent's caprice or weakness, and a child's pure scorn and contempt—or, what is worse, a purpose of playing on them for its own ends—inhabit that narrow range of close observation, it is an injurious life, and in some sad form, of alienated affections or of vitiated character, its effects remain. Even the love that has no voluntary

selfishness in it, if it is without method, without principle, without discipline, soon becomes a corrupting power ; for unless childhood is prompted by loving reverence, or disciplined by just authority, it must fall into mere self-will. And it is not of a regulated strictness of life and rule that a child ever feels the hardship : it will conform cheerfully to any amount of orderly work which only its physical strength can bear, and be all the happier for it : it will enjoy even a few indulgences with far more of gratitude because they are indulgences, and even a few pleasures with far more of zest and spirit because they are pleasures and not the wantonness of every day. We cannot recede from one evil in education without danger of falling into its opposite ; and we should not gain by the removal of an ungenial strictness that was sometimes cruel, harsh and wrathful to unrighteousness, if we were to have in its place only an indulgence that is always immoral and unprincipled. It is an alarming sign in this direction to find "The Educational Society" of the city of Lyons offering a public Prize for the best Essay on "the causes of the growing irreverence of children and young persons towards their parents, with proposals for an effective remedy." And the futility of such an offer is not so great as may appear, if we suppose it to be made, not for the sake of the Essay, but for the sake of calling national attention to a fact and symptom of the gravest signi-

ficance. It is only a few years ago that one of the great American Preachers* who is best known in this country, published a discourse on the same fact and symptom. Where America and France are in danger, England is not free. But as for any effective remedy, there can be none except in the characters, the wisdom, the principle, the mature qualities and regulated lives of parents. The age of harsh rule, even to unchastened and unrighteous anger, would be a light evil in comparison with a generation of parents who, in self-indulgence, in love of pleasure, in carelessness of responsibility, were but children themselves. In the whole life of Christ there is perhaps nothing more solemn and affecting than the prayer for himself in his relations to the disciples and to us all—the prayer for himself in the interest of those whom he called his “*little children*”—“Father, for their sakes I sanctify myself.”

The next interdict which our principle lays upon the wrath of man is to forbid its interference as a moral agent with any of the evils and offences—I do not now mean crimes—of our SOCIAL LIFE.

If on the dependent state of childhood it works no good, far less is it likely to have a moral operation when there may be arrayed against it the counter-irritations of a fiery independence. It is a positive relief to a conscience-stricken man to be excited to

* Dr. Dewey.

anger. Give him by undue asperity some natural ground of complaint, and he will eagerly turn the rising current into another channel, that in the flood of what he deems a just resentment he may drown the still, small voice. You have provided him with a means of escape from you and from himself. He can now stand forth as the injured instead of the injurer, and your angry interference has only inflamed where it struck. Not, of course, that the pure and gentle, and men steeped in social offences, marked by rudeness, coarseness, discourtesy, levity or vice, are to be received with no difference of feeling or of manner. But anger is not the righteous expression of that difference. Grieve if you will—be as cold as marble if you feel it only conscientious to be so—but be not insulting and irritated. Your reserve will be of more power than your wrath. The anger would only be a cloudy screen on what was pure and good in your moral revolt ; the sorrow, even to tears, might be visible gushings from its spring. For there is such a thing as righteous indignation—there is an instinct of just resentment which our conscience deliberately approves as the warning and weapon of God—there is a revolt from evil, an abhorrence of wickedness, which it is not good for an evil man not to witness, and all expression of which it is not good for us to suppress. He is a man of feeble soul who deals only in correct moral judgments, but never feels a passion

for what is good, a detestation of what is wrong. It is good for meanness to have to meet the eye which, "e'en when turned on empty space, burns keen with honour"—it is good for evil-doers, men or children, to have to tremble and betray their guilty secret before a glance of righteous condemnation, as it was good for hypocrites and Pharisees to have to look upon the awful face of the reproving Christ. Only, "be ye angry, and sin not"—which implies no doubt that there is an anger which is not sin. You may be angry if your anger has in it nothing of ill-will or of self-indulgence—if it keeps the law not to render evil for evil; for this rule admits only the indignation that is shocked and troubled by guilt, that cannot witness iniquity without something of personal anguish for lost goodness, and is the instinctive expression of the deepest sorrow. Moral distress may profitably take the natural form of indignation, if there is nothing in it of the personal indulgence of irritation, hatred, contempt, or vengeance.

The most delicate of all ministries is remedially to affect an erring mind through social agencies; and if man's wrath enters into the matter—not as a form of love, but as a form of judgment—there is small hope that there will come out of it the righteousness of God.

It will be questioned whether it is possible, in the constant friction and provocation of life, that all re-

sentfulness of temper should be suppressed. It certainly is not possible to him who permits himself to think that it is not. Nothing but the Christian law, growing out of the clear perception that every wrongdoer is an object for the deepest pity, when seen in the light of a brotherly conscience, will give a man the calmness of heart, the greatness of spirit, to love his enemies, to bless them that curse him, to do good to them that hate him. But surely there ought to be some power of producing the right spirit in that fact without controversy, that whenever the wrath of man comes in it is as a worker of unrighteousness.

Our principle is capable of being applied to some of the difficult questions of penal jurisprudence, though it does not belong to us to make the whole of the application. The arrangements by which a regard for the moral welfare of the criminal, as if he alone was to be considered, are to be combined with the well-being of society, are within the province of Legislation—a part of its province, within which they who tread need to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. But *our feelings* towards the criminal make part of the duty of all, and in fact form the public sentiment which Legislators represent. Briefly, then, there are two things to be remembered—that in the worst man a reformation is possible, and that man's wrath will not effect it. To exclude is not the way to assimilate—to punish is not the way to regenerate—

though some exclusion and some punishment may be unavoidable. We are concerned here only with the spirit of the legislation, not with its machinery; but we may protest by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, by him who was reproached with being the Friend of Sinners, by him who declared that the physician should be with the sick, that it is by multiplying the occasions of good-will—by new lights in the mind—by new sympathies in the heart—by intercourse, not by separation—that the enemies of society are to be won back to the bosom of humanity. This is not the place to utter what could only be individual opinions on momentous questions; but it is not a private opinion—it is a Christian law—that what we cannot do in Love, out of the conviction that it is *the best* for him to whom we do it, we must not do at all. The righteousness of Capital Punishment must stand or fall by that rule. If it is not the most merciful doom, which it may be, to one who has so spoiled this life for himself—to a murderer who can never again trust himself or be trusted—there are other and ample means, as by life-long restraint, of protecting society; and to retain the death punishment, if it is not best and most merciful for the unhappy criminal, would be national iniquity.—And how could Christians who believed that the day of death was the day of everlasting doom, the last day of opportunity, inflict it on the

sinner red-handed in his sin! That they can do so is evidence, that in their hearts they do not believe it.

And, lastly, the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God when employed as an instrument of controversy. Wrath has no effect on the understanding; it has an effect on the temper and the will most unfavourable to persuasion. The justifying plea for controversial anger is that error is wilful. Here are two assumptions: first, that there *is* an error; secondly, that it is wilful. It is not possible. A man cannot choose to *believe* wrong, whatever he may choose to profess. He may indeed be led into error by voluntary neglect of the means of knowledge; but *God punishes* that wilfulness by inflicting its natural penalty—the error and blindness to which it leads. Persecuted opinion indeed may summon to its aid a false pride, and as a matter of honour refuse even to listen, till every weapon is removed, every wall of separation thrown down; but that is Persecution's unrighteous work. When man's wrath is brought to bear upon error, its effect is to raise the spirit of a martyr, and a martyr on the wrong side. It is the unrighteous working of the controversial temper that it renders natural conversion to what is true almost impossible, and makes resistance almost a virtue, or easily mistaken for one. There is also an undue degree of favour attracted towards cruelly treated opinion. The persecuted error is far more sympa-

thized with than the persecuting truth. I suppose that often large-hearted men in this country have felt too favourably towards Roman Catholicism as a religious system, through detestation of its civil wrongs.

But the most unrighteous effect of man's wrath in controversy is when it obscures or distorts the ground of God's love for all His children, through the self-regarding fears and rage of unspiritual men, who think you would rob them of their assured amulet of everlasting safety. For what is all this war about? About a right belief—the right belief being regarded as the means of salvation. Are we to be in doubt about our having God's Love, until we are certain that we are in possession of God's Truth? How small are all these things, all honest differences, in the sight of our Heavenly Father! What must be thought above of the presumption of a man claiming to have God's Truth—and holding himself safe, and others unsafe, because *he* has it, and they have missed it!

There is only one answer with which we are concerned to the question—"Master, what shall I do that I may have eternal life?—Thou shalt love God with heart, mind, soul and strength—and thy neighbour as thyself."

XVI.

Self-denial.

LUKE ix. 23:

If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me."

THE measure of our spiritual health is in the strength of our conformity to the highest law of our being—in our effectual desire to have our life in Him in whom is no darkness at all—in the filial assurance that, inasmuch as our souls are not wilfully separated from the fountain of Righteousness, we cannot lose a Heavenly guidance. And since there is no limit to a blessedness that is thus derived, a child of God must desire at each moment to overstep the facilities of past habit, and reach forth to things before. Spiritual life, in all its earnest aspects, is a constant approach towards the Perfect, not without new effort and aspiration at each step. It is not Christian Goodness to obey constitutional impulses, and by a happy original conformation to be affectionate, gentle, guileless or devotional. It is not Christian Goodness to shed tears of sensibility, or in the ready glow of instinctive piety to feel the

breath of God wafted to us from earth and sky. It is not Christian Goodness to do what we take instant pleasure in doing, but rather to carry out our higher desires to that point at which what is delightful and uplifting in contemplation becomes laborious in execution. Christian Goodness, the goodness of aspiration and the cross, cannot consist in actions which cost the performer no sacrifice, or in emotions which end in their own indulgence. There is in every true life, and in every true hour of life, something of the *martyr* spirit—of a higher testimony, given at a cost, to the Spirit of God working in us. Spiritual life is life on the scale of immortality, for it has to make continual approach towards God, and God is inexhaustible. Such a conviction would seem to be inseparable from any real feeling of God : it is the root of growth, the spirit of life in Christ Jesus ; and all that falls short of this thirst for more, is but the amiableness of temperament or the fixedness of habit.

Such unqualified statement may provoke the question : “ Are, then, all our prompt and extemporaneous acts, impelled by the very spirit of Love moving freely in the heart, not distinctively Christian in their character ? Are all the delightful charities of life, which it would be pain to place under restraint, not of the nature of Virtue ? Are the springings of natural affection, and the emotions of piety that visit us with unworldly peace, not of the essence of Goodness ? ” That

all these things are good and beautiful, testimonies to the purity of our past, full of promise for the future, is not disputed ; but whether they are essentially Christian as distinguished from what is simply natural—whether they have a root of growth in them—whether they are merely complexional, or belong to the ever quickening life of God in us—may be a different question. In the natural moods of unspoiled childhood there is an affectionateness as beautiful, a tenderness as irrepressible, a purity as attractive, imaged in the clear, unabashed eye that is lighted from an inward fount which no conscious passion has yet stirred—in the silver voice which has yet caught no discord—in the look of repose, of a life drawn from far-off springs, which suggested the angel's whisper—in the smile of gladness which reveals the harmony of the faculties when first adjusted by the Divine Hand ; and yet we ascribe no *moral* character, we do not attribute *virtue* to the sensibility, the involuntary affections breaking into joy, the dauntless innocence of earliest childhood. The involuntary nature that is in the child we attribute to its Creator: the goodness which belongs to the spirit under trial does not yet exist.

It will be no reply to this to say, that the constitutional graces of infancy and the confirmed propensities of riper years are not parallel cases, because that the latter have outlived the wear of the world and withstood the causes that kill natural feelings ; for so far

as this is true do they fall within our stricter rule, involving the alternative choice, the resistance to evil, the preference of right, the energy of will and growth, which enter into the constitution of any service, of any state of character, that is a living sacrifice to God.

The objector may maintain that these native tendencies, coincident with Good, have produced, constitutionally though it be, their correspondent actions, until they have settled into solid habits from whose accustomed moulds no strength of opposition could now dislodge them, and *that this is Virtue*. But Habit is not necessarily *Christian Goodness*; and if its highest aspect is only the stability of accustomed life, it is certainly not spiritual at all. Faultless habits may be but the signs of a spirit that once was alive, but has long been dead—that has settled on its lees, as the Prophet puts it, and ripens no more. The young man who said to Christ, “All these have I kept from my youth up; what lack I yet?” was a person of unexceptionable habits; yet, because he had no affections all whose roots were alive—no spirit and principle of goodness, bearing ever fresher fruits, and going on unto perfection—he fell away from the Chief who led the Army of Martyrs, and went away grieved because he had great possessions, which habit had endeared and could not sacrifice. Habit is not impulse: it is not affection: it is not sentiment: it is not faith: it is not hope: it is

not love : it is not suggestive principle : it is nothing, and it has nothing, out of which newer, higher, severer, better life must come. The great service of Habit in the process of our advancement is in the preventive force which it exerts, enabling us to retain a position once reached, opposing the fixedness of its hold to any threatened descent, any relapse on a way already travelled. It is a fenced station on the long ascent, where, with our foot in a groove and protected by a battlement, we are safe from immediate danger, till we have strength to pass onwards and reach a new lodgment higher on the steep. But Habit by its nature is stationary. It can keep us from falling back, but is so far from having any impelling power, that it must be jealously watched as naturally adhesive and conservative. Religious habits are indeed of priceless value, provided they relate to means and instruments, and are not themselves the ends at which we aim. We should have a habit of Devotion, but not a habit of resting in the *same* devotions without seeking fuller intercourse with God. We should have a habit of doing Good, but not of doing the *same* good without increase of aim, power and sacrifice. In an age that perhaps is passing away, too much confidence was reposed in mechanical habits in the midst of those mighty living forces and passions which, whether for good or for evil, will wear no yoke of that sort, and whose beauty and glory it is that they

shape their own habits, and daily make all things new. Habit, it was said, is everything, habit is a second nature; and if this is said of the constant employment of means in the service of living affections, it is certainly true; but if it is said of any fixed states of action and of mind, however high, we might as well say that inertia is everything, that inertia is a second nature—a nature that has killed the first. Habit is merely the tendency to remain what we are—to go on doing what we have done—to acquire a facility of operation in given circumstances. Unless a living germ of Progress is in you, all that Habit will do for you is to enable you to keep your present *status* with less effort—that is, to become more and more mechanical. Nothing could afford stronger indication of the low views which men formed of Christian life than the efficacy which not long ago was supposed by our religious teachers to belong to this spiritless expedient for keeping hearts right with God, right with that Infinite Father who invites us to be followers of Him as dear children, to be perfect even as He is perfect. Some reputable position, where the tempted virtues might be caserned in safety, would often appear to be the amount of spiritual ambition—some hold-fast for the soul, some means of protecting an honourable character from wound or stain, all that was sought for. It would be impossible to cite an instance in which Christ—*he* whose distinction it is that he lived

ever from a sense of the responsibilities of a Son of God—recommended the adoption of such moulds for the soul, into which it may cast itself habitually and reproduce the same forms. He sought to instil principles of life, to put fruitful roots into the soil, to touch affections whose hunger is never satisfied, whose thirst is never quenched ; and it is characteristic of all such living principles that they make all things new, that they invigorate their former products, and push forth fresh forms of being—that though at first small as the grains of mustard-seed, they gradually lift their heads to heaven, and spread embracing arms over the earth. The tree that *grows* no more has begun to die. Christ's spirit was not represented by the wine that had settled on its lees, but by the wine that would burst the old vessels.

Yet righteous, or religious, Habit is all too holy, that in exposing its weakness as a spirit of life we should incur the slightest risk of undervaluing the service it performs in preserving many an exposed virtue from the downward road of temptation—in clinging to the purer heart with protecting remembrances—in leading to admonitory acts, suggesting trains of saving thought in the midst of other influences and on the brink of peril—in shielding from the world's encroachments the arrangement of our time, so as to rescue from each day some holy season—in building up a wall of solid works behind our most advanced posi-

tions, preventing retrogression ; yet all this may be barely conservative, it may make no provision for improvement, it may involve no principle of progress ; and through its aid alone we shall never realize the Prophet's vision of a soul's life in God, we shall never mount up with wings as the eagles, and renew our youth from day to day. It is not the re-inspection of a character just kept from injury, and rubbed daily from the dust and soil of the average world, that can supply the spirit of life that will free us for ever from the law of sin and death. Nor is it the particular state or stage of growth at which our souls die, if we have died by ceasing to grow, that is the essential question, if thus we die at all. "The water that I will give you shall be in you a fountain of water, springing up into everlasting life." The man whose virtues are only habits, and who is contented with that condition, has not yet discerned in his nature the rudiments of immortality ; and if he believes in eternal life, he has never put to himself the question, Why ? for what purpose ? on what grounds of divine fitness, has God assigned him an everlasting existence ? If the purposes of our being could have been accomplished on a narrower field and in a briefer time, if Habit could consummate our being, God would not have made us eternal : unless we have capabilities for unlimited growth, clearly we have in us no germ of the life of God, no roots of immortality. And as clearly, if we

are children and heirs of God, that there is an eternity of time before us will not save the loiterer from loss, if there is also an unlimited way to travel, and infinite heights to scale.

Is spiritual life, then, an unending struggle? Are we never to feel secure? Is vigilance never to be suspended? Are we never to breathe freely? Is there no haven of peace? Yes, there is a haven of peace: only, you are never so blessed that you may not be more blessed—you are never so high that you may not be higher—you are never so peaceful that you can have no more of the fulness of life in God. Is that a thing to complain of? The Christian life is a continual renewal, but only as a walk up a mountain is a continual ascent; and if the mountain is immeasurable, being indeed the heights of God's own nature, then of course the last summit is never reached; but if the ascent is ever-freshened health, power and joy, it is matter of privilege, not of hardship, that we are called to ascend for ever. Are we imperfect beings aiming to live after heavenly models? Of course that implies effort, and the lifting of our eyes to what is above us. And if we are what we say we are, children and heirs of God, can we ever be anything else than imperfect beings aiming to live after heavenly models? The direct struggle with evil may indeed fall from us, and ought to have fallen from us long since, but the throb of aspiration can never cease in a child of God. God

does not call us, however we may doom ourselves, to a repeated contest with the *same* foes, nor for the *same* prize ; the warfare of the child is not the warfare of the man, the warfare of the man is not the warfare of the Immortal, that we should think of one decisive victory, and of ever after holding our crown in perpetuity. If we must strive without ceasing, the fault is our own if it be not daily from a higher station and for a fresh glory. It is this truth which makes Self-denial a perpetual element in that Goodness which Christ inspires with the love and imitation of God. If our aim was short of this, effort might cease with the perfection of habit. It is this which requires a son of God to take up his cross, not on one great occasion, but daily, for daily is he called to transcend the past and receive more of the Spirit of his Father. New opportunities, new possibilities, open on advancing steps. Daily and hourly, in the eternal festival, God calls the humble ones, who raise meek eyes of aspiration, to come up and take a higher place nearer to Himself ; and at His command they must obey, or forfeit their place in their Father's house. But two things are to be remembered : first, that Effort is not necessarily pain, often indeed in itself the highest joy, and always essential to it ; and, secondly, that Self-denial is not the denial of *all* our desires, for at least there must be *one* desire permitted to have its way, one desire indulged, and that the highest of all, the master

of all, the desire to be one with God, since that is the very desire out of which the denial of Self proceeds. What, then, is Self-denial in its Christian sense? for clearly, when we deny ourselves, *we* are the deniers: it is one self denying another self, the real self, clothed with divine authority, denying the lower and usurping self. It relates to the rightful dominion of conscience and the spiritual affections, overruling the sway of the meaner tendencies. It is our soul's denial of the *selfish* part of us, of ease, of sloth, of pleasure and of power, that the affections which have not Self for their object may find us ready for their service. It is the supremacy of our sense of Right among the multitude of our prompters, or against the resistance of our inclinations. It is the starving and binding up of ungenerous desires, that nobler desires may have free course and be glorified. It is a command over the sensual passions of anger, fear, envy, jealousy and irritable impatience, that other powers, which bring only strength and joy and love, may be the masters of our being. If it mortifies a lower self-love, it is that a nobler self-knowledge may lift a meek and strong heart to God. It refuses a present pleasure, only because it is a kind of pleasure that Goodness, Reason, Conscience, Faith, Hope and Charity, could not then take in peace. When it restrains the love of gain, it is because it is pursuing priceless wealth, a gold that the world cannot assay. When it withstands the pleadings of indolence, it is

that the great ends of life may not be lost in sloth, sold away for a price on a par with Esau's pottage. If there were no higher demands of our nature, there would be no reason that the lower ones should be restrained. For Self-denial is no monkish virtue, no negative discipline, no recluse's safety, no ascetic's way of recommending himself to God, no pale, timid shadow shrinking from the light and denying itself the natural joys of man, no self-inflicted pain, the price paid here for escape from pain hereafter, no abject creeping on the earth that a Power to whom abjectness is pleasing may deign to cast his eye upon us,—it is the upward life of a child of God, loving what God loves, refusing to be in bondage to anything that would remove him from the light of his Father's face.

As we enlarge our experience of the only blessedness that has promise of eternal life, inasmuch as it alone needs eternal life for its fulfilment, the restraints which the Love of God imposes cease to be felt as mortifications, for our efforts are then not against our inclinations, but towards our objects. If we deny the lower life, it will serve the higher, and obediently take its own place ; but the spiritual nature never can be reduced to a peaceful subordination. Unless it is supreme, it will blight all meaner happiness as long as it lives at all. And, after all, we have only a choice of what we will deny. *Something* we must deny : the spiritual part of us or the unspiritual part of us ; one

or other must be in the place of authority ; they cannot be joint-rulers, though they may be fellow-workers if the spirit is supreme. The real self-renunciation, a living suicide, is when conscience is dethroned, when the soul is enslaved, when the will serves the appetites. God has a voice in every heart ; and to quench it, to renounce it, is surely the insane side of Self-denial. Eternal life—the life of the spirit—has a natural hold on every conscience ; and it is terrible self-abnegation to have to dash it impatiently away as often as it shines in upon unfaithfulness and guilt. In moments of purer desire, of troubled awakenings of the soul, there will still be coming visions of a blessed life to the fallen heart that no more can entertain them ; and it is awful when, instead of heralds of the promises of God, they come as witnesses against us—as avenging ministers of His righteous judgments—to tell of peace renounced and fountains closed against ourselves. Inasmuch as the one *keeps* the law of our whole nature, and the other sinks us for the time lower than the creatures to whom no alternative choice is given, who cannot abuse their nature—the blindness, baseness, madness of self-renunciation, the worst inhumanity, is to subdue the spiritual to the sensual, dethrone our souls, and refuse to be partakers of the life of God.

That a desire after God is always a reaching forth—that in this sense Self-denial is a constant element in

the religious life—is shown by the fact that in his most perfect moments the Son of God had occasion for its exercise. From that spirit which sin had not enfeebled, the crowning sacrifice of Self yet wrung the prayer, “If it be possible, let this cup pass from me ; nevertheless, not my will, but Thine be done !” Can *we* pay our *highest* service, act out our *best* affections, do God’s last bidding, with less need of effort and of prayer? What, then, have we learned of the way of life? “If any man will come after me, let him take up his cross daily and follow me.” What *is* our cross? Is it sin and selfishness which we must crucify within ourselves? Or, is it persecution for truth and righteousness’ sake—the martyr’s cross—which we must be ready to be crucified upon? Is it the cross which evil passions, or the cross which high privileges and solemn trusts lay upon us? the cross of Judas, who sold his Lord; or the cross of Peter, who at times had not strength to own him; or the cross of Paul, who held nothing to be attained, nothing to be apprehended—that we had only one thing to do—to forget all behind, as though it was nothing—to reach forth unto things before, and go on unto Perfection? What rises to each man’s thought as the rock of offence in his own spiritual walk? Is it indolence, or dejection, or envy, or discontent, or unsteadiness of purpose, or an unfaithful stewardship of God’s gifts and trusts, or low pleasures, or a soul that never prays? Let each

man, according to the conditions of his character and his place, make some definite exertion of Self-denial, some definite attempt to realize a higher and a fuller life, in view of his known deficiencies. Let the man of sloth ask himself for what it is that he is burying the prospects of his being. Let the man of the world engage in the strange work of meditation, and search his spirit in the light that does not die. Let the man of selfish pleasures face the awful look of human misery, and then turn his eyes on Christ and God. Let the man of unchastened temper humble himself to some brother who has suffered from his inhumanity. Let the man who suspects that all is not right within, look with a single eye into the springs of his life, and begin to set his house in order. And let the man of habits, of whom perhaps all the world speaks well, forego the sweet feeling of security, remember the calling of his nature, take measure of himself as child and servant of the Father who is his Taskmaster, and walk in the steps of him who took up his cross daily until he died upon it.

XVII.

A Perfect Man, who offends not in Word.

MATT. xii. 37 :

“By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.”

JAMES iii. 2 :

“If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man.”


WHAT is the true use of speech? To give knowledge or to give delight ; to gladden, quicken or teach by the intercourse of mind with mind ; to convey the gifts of one spirit into another, the treasures of one heart into another ; at the very least to give profit or to give pleasure by communication of thought and being ; and in no respect did God endow us with the faculty of language to injure, to corrupt, to wound, or even to use it indifferently.

There are two ways in which a man may offend not in word. He may refrain from *abusing* speech, and this is the negative virtue ; or he may have respect to its true purposes and *use* it without offence in all those ministrations of man's spirit of which it is the instrument and the voice. Now of course it is not the first

of these without the second that Christ or the Apostle had in contemplation : it is to be faultless in the use of an instrument, not merely to refrain from abusing it, that constitutes perfection in that particular matter.

And yet, taking into view only the negative merit of abstaining from making speech an instrument and expression of evil, when we consider how fully and how involuntarily a man's character is breathed into words, how clearly they betray where his thoughts are directed, and so introduce leading ideas into other minds,—when we consider the temptations of our life to the occasional indulgence of harassed, discontented, impatient, ungenerous or wounded feeling, which finds a ready vent at unguarded lips—that the Mercy which has nothing but forgiveness in its heart will sometimes first upbraid, and the Piety that has no thought of rebelling will yet betray its humanity and vaunt its hard case in preliminary murmurs—that a morbid or an irritated mood, too transient to leave permanent marks upon the heart or to have determinate action, will yet use the ready implements of speech and break into suppressed utterance,—when we consider the sweet and generous nature a man must have, and his power of command over its occasional excitements, to be free from blame in this matter, the more we know ourselves, the less shall we think it too much to say, “If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man.”—And when we take into one view our human

liabilities to disturbance, in our intercourses one with another, and the trials of our spirit in reference to that Providence with whom we live on trust, walking by faith not by sight,—when we consider that “He who will bring man into judgment for every idle word that proceedeth from him,” hath also wrapped us in the darkness of many a mysterious and many a disappointing visitation, expecting the hopeful patience of a loyal love, and, whilst under our own personal provocations, has placed us among fellow-beings towards whom we are to be instant, in season and out of season, if not with words of helpful love and wisdom, at least with generous forbearance and unhurtful silence,—when we remember our temptations, presuming the strength of the temptation from the prevalence of the sin, to form rash and unjust judgments upon half-knowledge or from sheer moodiness, and, from mere want of better occupation and worthier thoughts, to be idly speaking what we are idly thinking,—to give quick indulgence to disappointment, or irritation, or unsympathizing weariness,—to retaliate in miserable dignity coldness for coldness, indifference for indifference, injustice for injustice, or scorn for scorn ;—and how hard a thing it is from day to day to meet our fellow-men, our neighbours, or even our own households, in all moods, in all discordances between the world without us and the frames within, in all states of health, of solicitude, of pre-occupation, and show no signs of impatience,




ungentleness, or unobservant self-absorption,—with only kind feeling finding expression, and ungenial feeling at least inwardly imprisoned ;—nay, when we consider the difficulty of abstaining to speak insincere and empty words—a weariness to the flesh and spirit of all who hear them, because we think we are expected to speak, or might do good by speaking, and yet have nothing genuine to say,—we shall be ready to acknowledge that the man who has thus attained is master of himself, and in the graciousness of his power is fashioned upon the style of a Perfect Man.

And, if after having done full justice to the negative merit of abstaining from the abuse of words, we turn to the rare graces and endowments of him who can *use* them without offence for all the purposes they are empowered to serve,—if we consider that they are the most universal forms in which goodness, beauty, truth, persuasive influence, diffuse themselves through the world—that they are often the only possible expressions of what lies deepest and divinest in our nature, intimations of God, breathings from us, and responsively to us, of a higher life, whispers of the ideal, the “accents of the Holy Spirit”—that by *them* living fire kindles other hearts, and gentle wisdom comes like oil on troubled waters—that *words* can minister to sorrow and to sin—that words can pierce a heart living without consciousness of God, and make it alive to His neglected Presence—that words can

give a sense of healing fellowship to lonely bosoms, can arrest agitation on the verge of ungovernable passion, can reach and control without torturing, touch without wounding sensibilities all sore and tender—that words can become the most intimate communings of mind with mind, and the means by which the deepest spiritual affinities are revealed—if we consider this, we shall not dispute that whoever putting words to these their ministries, not as instruments of genius, or of any other exceptional gift, but of the deep, true, tender nature that in our measure is possible to us all, offends not in their exercise, and loses nothing of their attainable power, the same is, in the temper of his mind, a Perfect Man.

We have no indications of character so full and so delicate, no instrument that acts so instantaneously, that exhibits the lightest breathing of thought and feeling so truly, as words. Their “functions are ethereal;” the spirit makes through them its most intimate revelations. Many are the manifestations of the hidden man, the real man, which reach only to words and tones, which are inarticulate words—and which, if the lips were sealed, would be known only to Him who seeth in secret. Action at the quickest is not instantaneous, and prudence has a moment to take in the wisdom or the safety of giving visible embodiment to passions fluttering in us, or quick-shooting instincts of resentment; but words, sounds,



lie ready at the gates of feeling, through which they rush at the lightest signal, and betray, without our meaning it, what spirit we are of. The involuntary signs of character are always the truest. There might come to us a warning sufficiently solemn when we are told that we shall be judged according to our works ; but it is proceeding with us on a principle more spiritual and searching, carrying the sanction of our own conscience, when we are told that we shall be judged according to our words—"that by our words we shall be justified, and that by our words we shall be condemned." Not that this has any reference to Him whose eye is not upon outward expression, but on the living spirit ; but it may impress ourselves with a more lively sense of the inquisition that God makes into the actual state of the soul ; it may help us to make us aware of the strictness and purity with which He *looks within*, when we are told that the utterance of every thought, every sound that feeling prompts into being, goes to make up the evidence which is to justify or to condemn, which is added by the self-registering spirit to that long sum of testimony, the resultant Self, which we shall one day read and understand as the retributive product of all our history. Back to the heart's shrine, step after step, the Judge forces us. "By thy works shalt thou be judged : " "By thy *words* shalt thou be judged : " "A


good man, out of the good treasure of his heart, bringeth forth that which is good; an evil man, out of the evil treasure of his heart, bringeth forth that which is evil:" "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." To such genuine manifestations of ourselves, if we apply the rule that "for every idle word a man shall speak he shall give account thereof in the day of judgment," we shall not be wise beyond what is written, or placing ourselves in the judgment-seat, when we say of the men on whose tongues there is no reverence, who can speak lightly of sentiments without which we are poor, ungraced, unhallowed beings, that their words have condemned their spirit;—when we say of those who welcome images of impurity and reproduce them in other minds, that if by their words they are to be judged, by their words they cannot be justified;—when we say of those who can deal unfeelingly with what is most intimate to the being of another, whom no sentiment of reserve or of awe restrains when they speak of character, that their unchastened words betray the absence of the self-knowledge that would stay their unhallowed lips;—when we say of the things that are absolutely of no real interest to anybody, of the staleness, or unprofitableness, or levity, not to speak of worse offences, in which many a life does so wearily abound—that they whose conversation lingers among

them are unfitting themselves for that which is the very essence of spiritual blessedness, intercourse with higher natures, communion with God Himself!

Our most spiritual poet has attempted a true poet's theme when he describes the functions and ministry of sound, and of all sounds the human voice is the most potent. In the moral, if not in the physical, world, out of the same fountain proceeds sweet water and bitter—out of the same mouth, blessing and cursing. It is the same air which is charged with God's grace, and coloured by His love of beauty, and speaks His power, and is the element of every blessing man enjoys, of every organ he exerts, of every moment of his life, that vibrates also to an evil tongue :

“How oft along thy mazes,
Regent of Sound, have dangerous Passions trod !
Oh thou, through whom the temple rings with praises,
And blackening clouds in thunder speak of God,
Betray not, by the cozenage of Sense
Thy votaries, wooingly resigned
To a voluptuous influence
That taints the purer, better mind ;
But lead sick Fancy to a harp
That hath in noble tasks been tried ;
And if the Virtuous feel a pang too sharp,
Soothe it into patience,—stay
The uplifted arm of Suicide ;
And let some mood of thine in firm array
Knit every thought the impending issue needs
Ere Martyr burns, or Patriot bleeds !”

The most frequent and the most injurious offences of words are those which, by a general abuse of the purposes of intercourse and speech, insensibly wear away elevation and beauty of thought, and send a low spirit through society. Waste and unprofitableness of mind is indeed the far-spreading offence of words; yet so little witnessing against itself, and so diffused, is this evil of unworthy speech, that they who indulge in it will not easily be persuaded of the nature or of the extent of their offence, or know their need to remember in their prayers, "I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue." For it is not profaneness, nor impurity, nor irritation, nor the selfish pre-occupation and inconsiderateness that wounds at random, nor untruthfulness and insincerity, nor even the want of conscientiousness in giving utterance to what affects the life and spirit of another, common as this is,—it is nothing so definite, so concentrated, or so malign as these, but a low tone of interests, an absence of intensity of pursuit, of earnestness, of ruling ideas and endeavours, of rich and serious feeling, that strips life of its dignity, and converts words from the weighty or graceful instruments of lofty or of gentle and genial faculties into the counters and pastime of insignificance. Speech is but the manifested form or configuration of what is passing within, and topics, interests, that are worthy to make the groundwork of any happy and unweary-



ing intercourse, must be brought out of the treasury of an earnest nature,—for every loving and earnest nature *has* rich treasures, however poor it may be in natural gifts. That any high degree of moral excellence is possible only to one who has large interests, an open mind, a large heart, will not be doubted ; we willingly sacrifice what is lower in us only for the sake of what is higher ; desires, conceptions, purposes, go before attainment ; high feelings are the forerunners of high deeds. Out of their hearts men both speak and live. Looking even to the affections in their commonest forms, we know that the interest of feeling varies in its intensity, as in the purity of its quality, with the sources of sympathy, with the themes of intercourse, with the nature of the meeting-place of minds ; and feeble burns the flame that is kept alive on shallow, sapless things that give to thought no range, to the heart no richness. What strong bonds can exist between those who never enliven, quicken or strengthen one another—under whose touch heart, conscience or intellect, never bound ? Either a dearth of feeling follows a dearth of thought, or feeling becomes painfully disproportioned to its objects, and our nature begins to lose the blessed sense of responsive rest and satisfaction. Woe to the sympathy that begins to suspect that it is living unworthily, that there is not enough of loftiness, or of substance, in its being ! Certain it is that there is often a weariness over life which,

with the powers and tastes that God has given us, and the provision He has made for their inexhaustible indulgence,—with a creation of wonders round about us, and a mind organized to receive them all,—with the solemn concerns of our own higher life and the interests of our fellow-men—with strong affections which it needs a sense of their eternity to legitimate, a faith in their imperishable nature vouchsafed by God Himself, for without such faith no thoughtful man, without inhumanity, dare indulge in them,—that with all this bountiful provision for thought, beauty, sympathy and utterance, there is often a weariness over life which can only mark poverty of ambition, the unworked mind, the vacant conscience unmoved by all the problems of the world around us, the slothful predominance of the natural over the spiritual man.

What a blessed power is that which some minds unconsciously possess of breathing quickening thoughts and feelings into others : a new life goes forth from them ; they kindle a new order of ideas, and, without meaning it, change the tone of sentiment in all whom they approach ! And this, for the most part, not proceeding from anything extraordinary in their intellectual gifts, but simply from the rich suggestiveness of the earnestness or the playfulness of their moral being : they are true ; they are full of real interests ; they are self-forgetful ; they have never to *make* conversation ;

their tongues do not run before their hearts. This is the high ministry of words, accessible, in a measure, to all genuine natures. Speech was no more given to enfeeble, waste or blister, than it was given to blaspheme, deceive or slander. And God looks for the *use* of His instruments, and not merely for the absence of their abuse. We are not always satisfied with others for abstaining from offence: we *take offence* even at their silence, at the absence of expected words whose kindness, it may be whose sweet praises or courtesies, we looked for: and well may our silence offend God when, though speaking no evil, we yet utter no gracious, quickening words to relieve the weariness of life, the embarrassments of occasion—fulfil none of the spiritual ministries of speech, soothing, healing or enlivening. There is of course no outward remedy for this; it is no rhetorician's art that will accomplish us,—no skill or exercise in language,—nothing will help us here but moral sweetness and fine spiritual discernment. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. Still, after everything has been done in the way of instruction, of large interests and pursuits, of great and responsible employments that open and enrich our nature and place our powers upon the stretch, without which no man knows what he is or what God has given him, even the pure heart must place its freedom under the eye of a fine sympathetic discernment,—nor can we ever dispense in this matter

with a religious principle of control. "If any man among you seem to be religious and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, that man's religion is vain." We cannot, and we ought not if we could, live to ourselves, and keep free from the troubles, the disorders, the passions, the perversities, of the human beings around us; our thread of life gets tangled, crossed and knotted, by the lives of others, guard it as we may; our thoughts and hours are not our own, to keep their currents quiet in channels of our choosing; there is never wanting something to disturb from its balance an unchastened heart, a self-adjusted mind; there are thwartings, untoward accidents, threatened interests, inopportune visitations, defeated plans, spoiled arrangements, under which mere temper will never keep its peace; and who can move among these things in cheerful wisdom, with a meek, a strengthening, a pacifying voice, and offend not in word, if unguarded, unprompted, by the inward chastener and judge, warning us to "know what spirit we are of"?

Yet God puts no strain upon our nature. He has laid no uniform impress upon man's heart, or upon His own world. All states of natural feeling in their place are innocent, "from grave to gay, from lively to severe"—nay, more than innocent, needful to our completeness. *Solemnity* is but one aspect of simplicity, of sympathy and a healthy mind; nor must we forget that to re-

joice evermore is the religious frame of spirits. A rigid, severe and stern man, though he was pure as infancy, which indeed he will hardly be, for sympathy is a great cleanser, will neither be able to *use* words perfectly, nor yet to abstain from their abuse. Some of their functions he will not even conceive, and some of those that he does attempt he will never be able to exercise with a natural grace. No one means, unless he would be wiser than God, that our words should always be important, grave and weighty, but only that, in all our moods, they should be without offence—that to whatever conditions they are addressed, whatever chords they touch, they should come out of a heart that “thinks no evil.”

“Who is a wise man and endowed with knowledge among you? Let him show out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. And the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace, of them that make peace.”

So much depends on tones of voice, the subduing, elevating power of natural language informed by the heart, that the evidences of our Lord's use of speech, as that of Perfect Man, could not fully be reported. Yet ample and memorable are the suggestive testimonies, not alone in attitudes of his which we cannot

assume—"He spake as one having authority"—"He spake as never man spake"—but also in the magic charm which is purest issue of the life within, and in our measure open to us all—"And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth."

XVIII.

Strengthen what remains.



REV. iii. 2 :

"Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die : for I have not found thy works perfect before God."

WHEN things look difficult, there is an instinctive inclination to abandon the position and seek well-being in an untried sphere. Vaulting imagination lifts us at a bound out of our entanglements, and sets us down, free and unembarrassed, amid the supposed facilities of happier life. Around us are the old troubles which every day turn up afresh—the old difficulties of impracticable problems and impracticable people—the stale influences which excite to no new effort or hope—the flat and weary habits which there is nothing outward to break, and no power within to re-model. It is vain, helpless men begin to think, to stand where they are and disentangle this net-work—to untie all these hard knots—to introduce order into these arrears of confusion, life and movement into these dead or dying things ; but if they could break away from them altogether—if they could escape from the associates who

hang upon their strength and spoil their purpose of reform, from those wearied friends whose confidence has long gone, and whose hopeless looks turn them to stone—if on an unspoiled field they could start afresh—then the causes of past failure would act no more, and they might be new-born into a life of power. It is the old phantasy, not confined to the heartless or the indolent, the feeble in affection or in will, of those who dream that the problem of life would be more easily solved in any other circumstances than those in which they are.

And it is true that deliverance does sometimes come from change of atmosphere—a rescue, by external aid, from the familiar fiends that lurk in our paths and haunt our thoughts, whose accustomed spells we have not strength to break. Some hearts have been stifled from their birth, and in translation to new scenes is *their* only chance that a pure and cool air will breathe freshly on the low fever of existence, or that the sacred aspects of life will ever have internal reflections in their awakened perceptions and desires.—There are many, again, who could not *rescue themselves* from inveterate habits and evil communications, who yet, if their prison doors were opened by some saviour hand, would rejoice to go forth upon fresh plains, and forget for ever the noisome dungeons of the past.—There are also weak and sickly times in the history of most minds, when existence is distempered, when the grasshopper

is a burden—when the very blessings of life bring no gratitude, but only a feeling of unfitness and bitter agonies of shame—when the richest opportunities of God come to us only as joyless tasks and care-bound responsibilities—times of darkness, of soul-sickness and disease, in which, though the cure must at last work from within, alteratives are needed that reaction may begin.

The cases in which a change of external circumstances may possibly regenerate a character are, first, those of an utterly neglected education, in which the conscience, hitherto dormant or stifled, may actually be called into *existence* by some acquaintance with the purer forms of moral life; secondly, those in which reviving Virtue, still timid and drooping, desires to be removed for a time from scenes where former enemies abound, and no hallowing memory awakens, and the very air breathes only of past guilt and present shame; and, thirdly, those in which there is an utter want of adaptation between condition and faculty, between the work we have to do, the position we have to fill, and the aptitudes of Nature;—but where failure in life and peace arises from none of these causes, but from wilfulness, from faithlessness, from in exertion, from self-indulgence, from feebleness of purpose, from suffering things to perish through sheer default, what hope can there be that any new ordering of the outward conditions of existence will touch that deeply-seated disease,

and breathe the only true health, the energy of a conscientious Will, into the enfeebled soul? A flight from difficulties, which is of the very essence of disloyalty to God and Duty, He who will not be mocked is not likely to accept and crown with victory. Paradise, we are to suppose, was happily ordered, yet the fiend crept in. It was not the Fall of Adam that made man liable to sin, for then how could we account for the sin of Adam himself, who was born before the Fall? And another Eden, if that was all, would surely do no more for us fallen than it did for *him* before he fell: the old temptations would reappear, the unrooted habits would remain, the old sloth would seek its old indulgence, the evil spirits, if not awed by Conscience, if not banished by the presence of God, dislodged by holy interests and by healthy work, would flock in strength to their garnished homes; and self-banished, through moral faithlessness, even from a Paradise, our last state of man would be worse than the first.

Circumstance may greatly aid the Will; but the strong purpose of the soul—rooting itself in God—is the indispensable power of life. Awaken the resolve of Duty grounding itself on the inspiration of God, and the wilderness shall rejoice and blossom as the rose. Seek to supply the place of that inward strength by happy appliances and facile arrangements, and the garden of the Lord will become a wilderness again. It is not by seeking more fertile regions where toil is

lighter—happier circumstances free from difficult complications and troublesome people—but by bringing the high courage of a devout soul, clear in principle and aim, to bear upon what is given to us, that we brighten our inward light, lead something of a true life, and introduce the kingdom of heaven into the midst of our earthly day. The softest climes make the poorest men. Where everything else is produced easily, the spiritual man is not reared. We have cast from us all that specially links us to immortality and God, that appertains to the education of a spiritual being, when we sigh for mere facilities, and forget to look for strength to Him who appoints our work. If we cannot work out the Will of God where God has placed us, then why has He placed us there? What, then, is the remedy for all perishing states but to strengthen the things that remain, and call in the grace of God to water the root that still abides?

If we are perishing, and we are all liable to perish, in our religion, our relations to God,—in our social affections, our relations to one another,—at the secret springs of joy and strength within our own souls,—there is but one explanation, that we neglect the germ of life which the Father has planted in us all. We want nothing but *growth*, growth from the living shoot which God Himself imparts,—for with us, and within us, are the divine seeds of all things needful.

If in sad places of the world, permitted to run to animal waste and confusion, there are those in whom, by no act of their own, these seeds of life are stifled,—in whom, without fault of their own, no fresh growths come from the living shoot, and the root itself seems dead,—that at least is not the case with *us*, and if *we* are perishing, we perish of our own accord. There is not one of us who might not grow from the living germ, grow by daily obedience to the springings of life in us, until by insensible measures we grew towards the fulness of the stature of the perfect man in Christ Jesus. We have all a root of eternal life to grow from, which God is for ever stimulating. We at least have in our souls, and in our homesteads, in our field of work, enough of divine seeds and gifts to enable us to grow for ever towards Him who never withdraws *Himself* from what He gives—enough of *revealed* truth and guidance—enough of the fostering aids of human fellowship—enough of inward light from the promptings and presence of our Father's Spirit, if with faithful and obedient heart we lived *from these*, and sought their increase; and to no other heart will God enlarge the measures of His grace. In all these directions, if we are poor and needy, the Spirit saith unto us,—Nourish the root that is in you: "Strengthen the things which remain that are ready to die; for I have not found thy works perfect

before God." Religion—the Social Affections—life and strength in the individual Soul,—let us consider the perishings of these.

I. It would seem at present as if in all Churches the one thing needful was no longer a steady growing from the old root of faith,—that men are not applying and developing, but questioning, the heart-religion which inspired the lives of their fathers, and watched by their dying beds, and closed their eyes in peace. To use the illustration of a great satirist, who speaks bitterly of the religious self-consciousness of these times: If men do not eat their daily bread in thankfulness of heart, that they may do the work of life upon it, but employ themselves in suspicious analysis of it, to discover whether it is poisonous, or when they eat it, eat it in distrust and fear, it is not likely to contribute to vigorous health. Christianity, it is supposed, is failing in these days,—or, like some revolving light which observes no regular times, has now its dark side towards us, and we are waiting for the brighter phase which the next revolution may perhaps present. It may be doubted whether in any sect in Christendom there is at present a deep and quiet faith, untroubled by expectation or by fear, such a faith as could say, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation." We speak as if we were in a transition state, and what might ultimately come out of it

it were hard to say—some proclaiming that a new development of Christianity can alone meet the wants of this enlightened age, and others hinting that Christianity itself is under consideration, and is to have some new judgment passed upon it. Yet it is not at all upon its *practical* side that Christianity exhibits this questionable shape. It is not the religion of Christ, but its traditional theology, or its traditional history, that is under contention. None of us think that we have not light to walk by, but we pause in our steps to settle the theory of the light. A religion to live by—a religion to die by—a religion to bring God near to us in temptations—a religion to enable dying lips to speak in calmest trust the words of Jesus, “If ye loved me ye would rejoice, because I go to my Father,” and the dearest mourners to *accept the words* as blessed consolation,—all this we have—a religion to overcome the world, and conquer death, and fill the heart with the faith that we are in the keeping of a Heavenly Father, and that we can trust Him to guide us rightly though the veil of flesh is upon our spiritual eyes, and we see not *where* He is leading us,—this is a religion which is there not a church in all Christendom but believes itself to have, *as in truth it has*. Yet there is perhaps not a church in Christendom that is not looking for something more that has yet to come, and through dissatisfaction with what it is and has, poring over the

idea that Christianity has not yet assumed a satisfying form. Now if this was a lament over practical unfaithfulness, and its consequences to the inner light in withdrawing the secret grace of God,—that our doctrines were so much diviner than our lives that we hardly knew them to be of God because we were such feeble doers of them,—there would be both truth and hope in the lamentation ; but this is not the direction of the general discontent, nor is this the quarter to which we are looking for new light. It is the religion, not the practice of it, that is supposed to want renewing. Now we ask, whether in the things of the Spirit new light is to pass from the doctrine to the life, or from the life to the doctrine? And, speaking within the bosom of a Church which believes Christianity to be "*the Word made Flesh*," "*the Father manifested in the Son*," I am bound to speak my own conviction that we have got all the light that God will ever give us except the light that comes from life, from the Word made flesh again, from the manifestations of Himself which the Father gives to those who love Him, and will to do His Will. It were easy to dream of a Light that would resolve every intellectual doubt—of a Voice pealing out of heaven in audible words and tones that would melt into every heart, and draw forth its captive affections to be fellow-workers with Christ in a world where Love alone was the law of being—of a Guidance that would take us by the hand

and point as with a sunbeam to the open way of peace and duty ; but it is not *thus* that the Father educates the germ of eternal life, the image of Himself, which He has planted in His children's souls. They must have life in themselves, and grow by living *from* the life they have. Nor is the life that is in us left to grope darkly towards its issues. In the mirror of our own nature we can behold with open face the glory of the Lord, and be changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. Is the knowledge of God that shines in the face of Jesus Christ too little for us? Was the Forerunner not tempted enough to be an example and a succour to us also who are tempted? Is there no spiritual power sufficient for our occasions in the faith that Gethsemane strengthened and Calvary proved? Are any of *us* looking in speculative directions for a satisfactory religion, who yet believe that God on one of our brethren has taught the world by sample—shown in him the character, spirit, effort, prayer and peace, of a true child of His, and received him into heaven as the natural home of those who live, and love, and suffer in His Spirit? Is not this enough of a religion? Have we put ourselves into it? Or have we suffered it to come to us in “word,” but not in “power”? If so, it were easy to account for any amount of discontent. If so, must not the Spirit that spoke to the Seven Churches now say to us : Live

from the principle of life that is in you, cherish the spark that is not dead: "Strengthen the things which remain that are ready to die, for I have not found thy works perfect before God."

But then, it is said, the administration of religion is so powerless amongst us. Alas! have we no fire of our own that will burn the poorest fuel? Are we for ever to wait for the crumbs that fall from other men's tables, and complain that we are not fed? Does the feeble word fall upon sensibilities prepared to kindle? Does the prayer become spirit and truth within our own souls? Do we pray at all, or only listen? Are we really the living members of a Church in which God is the Fountain of force, and the spiritual wave passes from soul to soul, so that, in the words of St. Paul, "If a stranger was to come among you, an unbeliever or a gainsayer, he would be convinced of all, and the secrets of his heart made manifest; so that falling down on his face he would worship God along with you, and report that God is in you of a truth"?

II. Next to our life in God, our strength depends upon the life of the AFFECTIONS: and the power of these is more in what *we feel* than in what is felt *towards us*. The warmth, indeed, that is thrown into the inner forces of our life from the warmth of others towards us is immeasurably dear and strengthening, but to make it our direct aim would be only a form of self-seeking; it is one of the things that are "added

unto us." In all things it is more blessed to give than to receive ; and even as regards those to whom we should never dream of imparting anything—rich hearts that pour their charities like a flood into our shallow sympathies—strong minds whose steady gaze at once finds out our strength and our weakness—firm hands that make light of difficulties that to us are mountains—it is, after all, not the direct aids they give us, but the genuine reverence *we give them*, the love and admiration we cherish for them, that make them true blessings to us. But in this matter of the Affections, it is very easy in our demands upon the affections of others to forget the natural play and duty of our own, and, unless all is given *to us* that we could desire, to deem that the claim upon us is proportionally lessened. It is easy to set up an ideal of the kind of sympathy we should desire, and, if that ideal is disappointed, to act as if we were discharged from the creative work of our own hearts. Yet it may be that the elements of all that we desire are actually present with us, if only we would spend ourselves upon them. At all events, there are few cases in which our allotted work in life is so fixed as in what relates to the duties of the Affections ; and if to desert a post of danger is the loss of honour, to turn away when the heart is appealed to is not less to be unworthy of the place where we were stationed by the God of Life and Love. What trust from God is so distinctly ours as

the hearts and minds which Nature and Providence have woven in with our web of life? And be it that there is, and if our love is wide enough there must be, disappointment, is not the Eternal Spirit daily disappointed with us all? If anything of that inward fidelity to our own charge, which is ever the deepest witness to the long-suffering of God, is passing from us—if any heart-trust, our directest testimony to Him who inspires the heart, is weakening and giving way—ere the bruised reed is broken, the still smoking flax of any yet living affection quenched in death and darkness, let us hear as the pleading of Him whose undeserved love towards us is ever grieved and ever patient—"Strengthen what remains, though ready to die; I have not found thy works perfect."

III. And, finally, of the life of the Conscience, of the individual Spirit, if anything is perishing there, what can we do but lay eager hold, the desperate grasp of men escaping destruction, on what yet remains? If any voice of God, distinct once, neglected long, has some faint whispers still—if any vision of true life, oft thrust aside, revives sometimes, though in fading colours fast vanishing from the soul—if any memory of early prayers and vows starts suddenly athwart our worldliness to show how changed we are—then to gather up the whispers of that still, small voice, until it speaks again with the authority of Eternal Law—to detain that vision until it takes clear shape and

becomes anew as Christ formed within us—to go back to those early prayers, until amid earth and time we feel ourselves, as of old, God's children and care—these are the ends for which the Heavenly Grace still lingers near us, to beseech us that we turn not away and die. Only strengthen the things that remain. Cherish the feeblest ember. Quench not the spirit. Of our life in God nothing is for ever lost, whilst anything remains. The smallest spark, if we bring it to Him and keep it with Him, He will blow into a flame. To every heart perishing, but not perished, the Spirit of God still speaks the words that strengthened the Churches :

“I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it ; for thou hast a little strength, and hast not denied my Name. Behold, I stand at the door and knock : if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him.”

“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches.”

XIX.

Not of the World, as Christ was not of the World.



JOHN xvii. 16:

“They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.”

WHAT is the legitimate influence of those large and necessary interests which are classed together and stamped, not to say stigmatized, with the name of “the World,” is a great spiritual question. What their proper function in the essential work God and our own souls are carrying on, the creation of Character? How far, and with what view, should they be permitted to engage the affections, to occupy the earthly task-time, of beings who, having immortality, must find a bread of life that does not perish in the using?

These are questions on which there exists, in some, a perverted, self-regarding, spiritualism which in effect makes religion one long protest against the ways of Providence, as though God made the world only for us to despise it and hold ourselves above it; and again, in others, an unsettled condition of law, indecisive of where between right and wrong the line lies,

which gives to inclination a discretionary power and betrays into latitudinarian practice.

There is a "presumptuous sin," as of short-sighted creatures, with convex eyes that cannot see an inch before them, pronouncing with microscopic intelligence on the vast arrangements and complex harmonies of God, in disposing all objects of earthly affection and pursuit under the common brand of things proscribed, which is revoltingly offensive to genial men of healthy common sense, who resent it as nothing short of personal insult, knowing how impossible it is that with them reason and nature ever should succumb to it, or that religious life, if such is its true theory, should ever have a real interest for them. And sometimes in their contemptuous recoil they are alienated from the truth itself, not perceiving that their natural scorn is really an instinctive protest on behalf of God, a protest spiritual in its root, though only carnal in its contempt.

There is, on the other hand, a state of indecision as to how far it is right to fall in with the ways of the world, a moral judgment not determined by any defined principle as to the lawfulness or unlawfulness of a vast number of desires, amusements, indulgences, objects of solicitude or ambition, which is most hurtful to Conscience by depriving it of the clear tones of unhesitating authority. Wherever in moral things there is a dubious territory, a debateable land, the timid and scrupulous approach it with the compunctious uneasi-

ness of a punishing and limiting conscience, without the nourishing vigour or dignity of a clear and righteous resolve ; whilst those to whom finer scruples are unknown rush in, unguided by any spiritual law, holding it enough to justify license that there is no positive enactment, no unmistakable warning, like a notice on reserved grounds, forbidding trespass.

It is therefore of first importance that this spiritual question should be settled, if it is capable of settlement ; that religion should neither pass into contempt under the imputation of impracticable requirements, of feeble ignorance of the real meanings of our present life and of the universe which is now our sphere,—nor lose anything of its rightful authority from the indistinctness of its boundary-lines in the absence of a discriminating rule ; that the tender spirit be not compressed, mortified, emaciated, as though God's universe was a monk's cell ; and that the unscrupulous spirit meet with specific restraints, interposing barriers, clear demarcations, which it must designedly break down before it enters prohibited ground.

Take the simplest statement of the case : there is the world that now is, and the world that is to be, with the same soul, stationed within the one, discerning the other, to rule itself towards both according to the laws of the soul ; whilst Christ says of those who have his spirit, " They are not of the world, as I am not of the world." It is clear from the most imperfect statement

of our present position between two contrasted stages of existence, the one the seed-plot and nursery of the other, that what we need is a frame of spirit and a walk in life that will place us in harmony with the purposes of God in both. And though the earthly period is related to the heavenly period, as mortality to immortality, the spiritual life that is common to both and now holds them together, being life in God, must have the same springs of action, the same law, the same standard, the same goal. What is bound on earth is bound in heaven ; what is loosed on earth is loosed in heaven. Living under earthly conditions of task and aim, with the faith of Christ in a kingdom of heaven within us now, and hereafter to be fulfilled, our true work must be the same, whatever outwardly or inwardly may change ; and the golden mean that unites the life that now is with the life in which we have faith, is not the moderation that shares itself between them, which gives the working day to the world and a few prayers, night and morning, to the soul—the week to the earth and the sabbath to heaven—and whose scheme for attending to both is to pass at proper intervals from the one to the other, but that which brings the same heart to both, blends and combines them in the same act and thought, fuses them in the light and heat of the soul, moderates our devotion to the present by pursuing it on principles, and using it for ends, which the future will not discredit,—mode-

rates our devotion to the future by living for its ideals now, dealing with the Mammon of unrighteousness in the spirit of the heavenly friends who are to receive us into everlasting habitations.

How did Christ reconcile earth and heaven? "They are not of the world, as I am not of the world." If we can determine in what sense one so open to all human sympathies, so tender to all mortal maladies and wants, so directly recognizing the desires and necessities of our natural condition, so simply practical, was yet not worldly, we have solved the question and found the spiritual harmony we seek. Christ solved it in his life: that we may do so too, it is necessary to understand the principle of his solution.

The encircling, though not the central or root, faith of Christianity is the immortality of the spiritual part of man,—all-encircling, because, if we are not immortal, we are not, what an Apostle calls us, "partakers of the Divine Nature;" we are not, what Christ calls us, "children of God," heirs of all that is His; and because, if we are not immortal, though what is noble and right would not change its nature, we could no longer regard discipline, bereaved affection, sorrow, temptation, disappointment, experience of wrong, pain and anguish, as means towards the ultimate perfecting of ourselves and of all our brethren; they would often themselves be ultimate and insoluble facts of evil. Immortality, therefore, was the great postulate of

Christ; he brought it into the light of life, but he never professed otherwise to reveal it; he assumed it—to deny it being the negation of the Fatherhood of God, for there is in reality on the part of God no personal relation or friendship between His Spirit and ours if, notwithstanding the hope, the faith, the love, which He feeds, we fall from Him into annihilation. And the law of immortality requires us to withdraw our *heart* affections from whatever is not eternal in itself, nor fitted to educe, exercise and nourish, some portion of us which is eternal. The imperishable for its own sake, the perishable for the sake of the imperishable, is clearly the law which immortality prescribes. Our Christian vocation is “Life brought to Light,” that which alone is our life, “the hidden man of the heart,” standing clearly out between earth and heaven; and to be the children of that light is to have our hearts in the treasures, our tastes with the perceptions and pursuits, our affections on the properties of being, the delights and graces natural and spiritual from which death cannot separate us, if it opens to us any world where God is worthily revealed. Whatever has so little of alliance with God’s nature that at some time we must be parted from it, whatever cannot be with us in heaven, however we may have to deal with it as a thing of discipline, however strengthening it may be to work with it or to fight against it, as a thing for the affections the law of immortality ex-

cludes, and warns the heart that would garner no perishable love, "Taste not, touch not, handle not." It is not that the thought of our mortality is to be constantly intruding as an external check, the ghastly warning of the skeleton hand, but that estimates of blessedness, habits of thought, for which we shall never need to blush, desires consistent with our immortality, be constantly within us, with pursuits and joys nourished by the waters of unfailing life. Whatever its earthly accompaniments may be, what flows purely out of any portion of our nature which can live in heaven is open to him who would use this world without abusing it. It may be toil for material goods, or silent search for the treasures of knowledge—the active energies of the practical man, or the pregnant abstraction of meditative solitude—conflict with this world's trials, or intense enjoyment of this world's blessings—the indulgence of our natural tastes on the glory of God's works, or of our natural affections on the richer world of the human heart—it may be grave and serious wisdom, or wit, humour and light-hearted gaiety—if only it gives strength and grace to any immortal capacity, it is no more connected with anything that Christ condemns as the world than was the mind of Christ himself. Meeting all the conditions, opportunities, of earth, he had his conversation in heaven; for the spirit that is of God makes heaven everywhere.

There is no difficulty in laying down a clear rule as to the limits within which the pursuit of present things is legitimate : the difficulty is in having the spirit which alone can apply the rule, and give unity to a nature so varied in its susceptibilities, so single in its essence. It is vain to speak of furnishing any one with the right principle on such a question, unless you can furnish him also with the singleness of eye, the purity of will, which both perceive and know what things we ought to do, and have power and grace to do them faithfully. No law, whatever may be the precision of its statement, will enable us to carry it into the midst of complex life, unless our spirits are touched by Him whose presence and promptings with us are ever our highest impulse as to ends, our purest wisdom as to means. There is often a seeming indiscretion, a generous absence of what is called prudence, a miscalculation if only this world is considered, which is "Wisdom from above." And who will deny that in any particular case, it is matter of inward intent whether the principle is honoured or infringed ? The temporal goods whose proceeds of enjoyment perish in the using are simply instruments of our mortal condition, which, unemployed to strengthen or adorn what cannot perish, are the idols of a Belial or a Mammon worship ; but the desire and effort for earthly possession that are as prayers for our daily bread, that we may be strong upon it to do all God's

Will in grace and thankfulness of heart—where the duties and joys of benevolence, the hunger of our nature for visible and spiritual beauty, the desire to surround ourselves, and all the world if we could, with forms of art that have spiritual meanings and can only be interpreted by the soul they help to awaken—where the interests of man as a being to be aided, taught, guided, developed, that he may be made a man indeed, are regarded as the legitimate use of riches—where it would be felt as infinite loss to have an unclean breast for the sake of ill-gotten gain, life in God and life without God being incommensurable—there all that earthly business is sacred discipline, and it is not sanctity or spirituality, but a blinded sanctimoniousness, or a lean asceticism flying from the real problems of Providence, that dares to call it worldly. Again, the pleasures that only waste time and strength and do nothing to save them, the successive changes and consumers of a frivolous existence, are doubtless frightful modes of being for one moving hourly towards eternity with only his habits for his outfit; but the pleasures that are the lighter breathings of a pure and earnest spirit, giving the refreshment of new interests and restored zest for toil; pleasures that touch the finer, more prophetic senses; pleasures of sympathy; pleasure in the pleasures of others, in the joys of children, in the liberation from restraint of a free, gay heart, disporting

itself in unguarded trustfulness and love ; nay, pleasure in pleasure, because it is God's Will to bless us, and we take from His hand the full cup of life, or a momentary delight that cheers us by the way with spiritual recognition and answering thankfulness, even as we receive that other cup which Christ prayed might pass, but took and drank with responsive faith ; pleasures that send the soul with buoyancy and gratitude to its more arduous tasks,—these are virtues and pieties in themselves, and among the best aids to virtues of higher mark that life affords, contributing, as light upon a picture, to the perfection and finish of Character, like the dear, homely things, of familiar use or joy, placed by the masters of art side by side with things of deepest pathos, to reveal by contrasts the vast range of life the heart of man can purely hold.


We have the living Christ to interpret his spiritual teaching, and without the example and person of Christ his words would be no real guides to us. They would not be able to save us from any fanaticism, or abuse or evasion of spiritual truth, to which our nature might be prone. It was the same spirit that said in pure love, "Whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also," that also said in pure remonstrance, "If I have spoken evil, bear witness to the evil ; but if well, why smitest thou me?" To be most in the world, in the midst of its real interests, difficulties, joys, sorrows and problems,

in the spirit of Christ, is to be most like Christ. The easier way would be to leave the world, and in self-concentrated introspection suppress the life of the soul by seeking to save it. There is but one Christian way of being kept from evil : nothing but the full life of all goodness will preserve us from the power of all evil—of goodness as various in form as the offices that God assigns to various faculty, and makes pure to the pure. Your life in the world may not be my life, nor my life yours, and yet God accept us both as children of His Spirit and members one of another.

If Christ was not of this world, it was not because he left it to itself, or wrapped himself in mystery, or was without sympathy for any human condition, or untouched by any cry of emotion. He lived as a man among men. He assumed no special sanctity, no signs of separation. He sat at rich men's tables. He associated with those of evil repute and of no repute. He said of himself, that he came eating and drinking. It was charged against him that he was "gone to be guest with a man that was a sinner." He gave currency himself to the coarse reproach that he was "a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber," not fearing to take it up, and only adding, "Wisdom is justified of all her children." For he who cannot pass blamelessly through the common conditions of our life, taking them as they are, and evading none of them, is no Saint of God and no Saviour of men. It

is not to be above any human necessity, but to meet it fully and purely, that tests spiritual power. If the Son of Man was not of the world, it was not because his spirit was not large enough to take in both earth and heaven: it was because this earth was a sacred place where God was unfolding His Providence and men were fulfilling their preparatory destinies; and when he looked upon them in the light of their immortality, his tenderness flowed out even in tears—not the tears that lie near to the eyes, but out of the anguish of his spirit—for those who, in the crisis of the world's opportunity, were rejecting the counsel of God against themselves, not knowing the times of their visitation.

It is said of every painting that has no clear outlook to the sky, that it leaves a stifling impression on the mind of confinement and limitation. And so of every human life that has no natural outlet to the infinite; it is then of the world, and of the world only. Yet we have no external measurements for such states of the spirit. Only the individual conscience, and He who is greater than the conscience, can tell where worldliness prevails, with the heavenly outlook closed. Each heart must answer for itself, and at its own risk. That our souls are committed to our own keeping, at our own peril, in a world so mixed as this, is the last reason we should slumber over the charge, or betray the trust. If only that outlet to the infinite is kept open, the



inner bond with eternal life preserved, while not one movement of this world's business is interfered with, nor one pulse-beat of its happiness repressed, with all natural associations dear and cherished, with all human sympathies fresh and warm, we shall yet be near to the kingdom of heaven, within the order of the Kosmos of God—in the world, but not of the world—not taken out of it, but kept from its evil.

XX.

Our Lord's "Trouble of Soul."



JOHN xii. 27, 28:

"Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify Thy Name! Then came there a voice from heaven saying, I have both glorified it, and I will glorify it again."


TWICE on the same day did our Lord exhibit remarkable contrasts between the outward aspects of his fortunes and the emotions of his soul. It was indeed within an hour that he looked upon the City from the Mount of Olives, and, unconscious of the triumph that spread his way, of the Hosannahs that rent the air, gazed upon Jerusalem through blinding tears; and that he stood within the temple court, surrounded for the first and only time with the signals of the accepted Messiah, not flushed with hope, but stricken in spirit, sunk into the deepest places of his being, alone with his destiny and his God.

We all know something of the power of revolting contrasts to torture human sensibilities; and the most revolting of all discords is when on the highest in-

terests a sympathy is offered from which the soul recoils—when through some odious mistake the selfish claim fellowship with the self-devoted, the impure with the holy. When the multitudes went forth to meet Jesus coming to Jerusalem, it was not the universal spiritual Deliverer, but the avenging M^éssiah—not the Son of Man, but the Son of David—that they hoped to greet; their thought was not his thought, their expectation was not his expectation; from such abhorrent sympathy he was forced back into his own being; their acclamations were less endurable than ever had been their execrations or threatenings of instant death; their joy was but the presage of coming rage and guilt, a hideous delusion, hollow, false, blind and dark at heart, and he who knew the truth was shaken by the power of appalling contrast in one of the few moments of emotional agitation that ever disturbed that perfect and equal mind. Again, when he stood within the temple, and the people pressed near, and the priest shrank back, whilst strangers from distant Greece expressed their sympathy and besought his notice, the power of contrast and of truth is again busy with his spirit; his eye is upon the reality; through the acclamations of "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord," he hears the undertone of disappointed passions, "Crucify him, crucify him;" he knows that his way of spiritual manifestation is now only by the cross, the grave, the

resurrection—that the Christ of God must pass into heaven that no carnal dream may be able to connect itself with him, and the world he came to save be drawn to see him only in his relations to a life divine. "The hour is come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone ; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit."


It was in this moment of absolute human solitude that the sensitive nature of Jesus realized the providential aspects of his position, and trembled. For what now rested upon him? The revelation of God in and to man—not by that easy way of miracle which the Tempter suggested, but by the presence of the peace and majesty of God in his person, by the unbroken union of the Son with the Father through scenes of humiliation and anguish, which in their first aspects would seem only to declare that God had rejected him and disowned his claim. What if he should fail! What if, through some unknown strain, some untried part of nature's weakness, though only for a moment, he should drop the tie that united his spirit to his God! What if the revelation in human nature of the Father dwelling with the Son should not be made *by him!* What, if *all* should be lost—for here *all* was lost unless all was gained—through failure of strength at some unsuspected, unguarded place, an instinctive disturbance of the spiritual action of faith



in the last agony of trial! What if there should be some unknown power in circumstance, in pain and torture, even for an instant to baffle and blind the soul! Do we suppose that these thoughts were not his? Do we suppose that humility, even to self-exhaustion, was not his strength, or that he could have been so calm on Calvary if he had not so trembled in Gethsemane? Do we suppose that God *made* him constitutionally perfect, as He makes the flowers and the stars, and that the personal will and soul of Christ had no part in the conflict? Can any one fail to see throughout all the life of Christ, pre-eminently in his death, the great purpose that was in him questioning the mortal nature, brooding over it to bring it to a strength that was not its own, exploring it in the light of God to discover possible sources of defeat?


We may not be able, with anything approaching to exact truth, to analyze his "*trouble of soul*;" we are too far from him fully to understand him; but we can all feel how natural, to the most prepared spirit, would be the first shuddering sense of unknown trial—the apprehension of concealed causes of failure in so great a mission—the recoil of the mortal nature from the picture in the soul. For it is always in this form of "*trouble in the soul*" that the great occasions of God first present themselves; and when the *vision of our calling* is before the spirit ere the hour of action comes,

bringing its inspiration with it—when the energies that rise with the crisis have heard only from afar the summoning Voice, and all the might of Duty lies yet passive, whilst the sensibilities are stretched on the fear and apprehension of vast undertakings—then the highest natures are those that for a time, by necessity of their spiritual rank, will be troubled and overpowered—by the necessity that is on them to hearken to the Spirit that speaks to them—to be and to do that to which they are called, whilst, as yet, they know only their human weakness, and dare not arrogate the strength which God supplies. To have the imagination oppressed by the distinct picture of appalling trial, whilst Conscience and the Will are not yet in the circumstances that bring out their might—to have the grandeur and the terror of the forethought before the soul meets the crisis and feels the present inrush of divine power and help—this is the form in which every spirit that sacrifices to God and Duty has first to contemplate its coming hour of martyrdom. And if that first and most terrible crucifixion, without aid from excitement, or sympathy, or the awakening demands of external occasion, has been really undergone in the depths of the soul—not one drop, one ingredient, of the cup inwardly untasted—the victory of Duty is won already, and the outward conflict, when it comes, is but the image of a struggle that has passed away. He who trembles in the presence of his own purposes—



say rather, at the inward presentation of God's purposes to him—who distrusts his own strength in the contemplation of appalling Duty—who, after having yielded this its due tribute to sensibility, calls in a mightier Power to subdue that natural weakness, quiets the tremors of the imagination by the suggestions of the soul, and rises to the height of a holy resolve, with no excitement but the kindlings of God's Spirit, and no witness but Him who seeth in secret—may go forth in the confidence that no defeat is possible to that prepared soul, that God will not desert those all whose strength is in *Him*, and, with something of the assured faith of the Master, after his tremblings but *before* the crucifixion, when nothing was met and known but the weakness within, "the trouble" only of apprehension calmed, the agony only of anticipation passed away, say in peace, "Be of good cheer, *I have overcome the world.*" He *had overcome it there* where alone the danger lay; he had left no unexplored place, no unchastened, unstrengthened, weakness; and Calvary, when it came, was but the triumph of a purpose that had anticipated its trial hour, and obtained strength to love and suffer unto death. Never, perhaps, did a holy and filial resolution issue out of the consciousness of weakness, out of tears and tremblings, and go forth to suffer a defeat on the field of the world. And never, perhaps, was a moment of difficult duty met in the confidence that feels no

fears and knows no strugglings, without the spirit that was manifested falling below the occasion, if not utterly sinking beneath it. Every highest act of self-devotion to God and Duty must be a struggle, since it is the highest that then is possible to us ; and if the struggle has not place in the secret chambers of the spirit, it must take place without preparation, when and where we have no security against defeat. The greatness of the Cross, of the death on Calvary, had its first beginnings when Jesus commenced the conflict within : " Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say ? Father, save me from this hour ? " No ; the filial heart of Christ could not say that to God : the Son who knew the Father could not take it upon himself to be his own Providence, and ask the God of Love and Light to avert from him an hour of the Divine appointment. God gives the times and the seasons, and man must neither question nor shun them, but use them, and show in them a spirit that walks in the light of Him in whom is no darkness at all, in all whose face there is not one speck of cloud that man may fear ; knowing that " for this cause," with a knowledge of their fitness, the Father sent them. " Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say ? Father, save me from this hour : but for this cause came I unto this hour." And now he knows what alone a Son of God could say : " Father, glorify Thy name !" And God immediately meets the Soul



that is raised to meet *Him*. "Then came there a voice from heaven saying, I have both glorified it, and I will glorify it again."

Here we have all the transitions of a perfected human spirit, ascending from its consciousness of the weakness of humanity to a diviner strength, in its sense of alliance with and rest in God,—and God Himself breathing peace and confidence on the soul that out of its "trouble" turns to the Father and claims the resources of His Spirit. In the language of St. Paul, it was the natural man that trembled—the spiritual man who leaned his tremblings on the mighty power of God. It was Jesus who said, "Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour:" it was the Christ of God, the soul in communion with Heaven, that said, "But for this cause came I unto this hour: Father, glorify thy name:" and it was to a spirit long trained to leave the issues of things to the Eternal Will, and to listen only for the summoning voice, that the Father spoke the strengthening words: "I have both glorified it, and I will glorify it again." He *had glorified* it when in the temptation, and, as often as it was renewed, the Sword of the Spirit conquered the world: He had glorified it in those gracious works which were revelations of the goodness of Him whose Spirit was in them: He had glorified it in that heavenly Character, that Mind of Christ, the Image of the Father, from

whose fountains of sanctity and love it was issued into life: He glorified it again when, through a strength drawn from these tears and prayers, the Captain of our salvation was made perfect through suffering—when the cross could not cloud his love, as the grave could not hold his spirit: and still he glorifies it in the grace and strength derived through him, which are glorifying from age to age the spirits of those who love him: and whenever any disciple of that Master, under pressure of a great responsibility, at the first thought of sacrifice and suffering, obeys the suggestion of nature's weakness—"Now is my soul troubled: Father, save me from this hour"—but afterwards, taught from above, borrows the diviner spirit of the Lord—"But for this cause came I unto this hour; Father, glorify Thy name"—then is God fulfilling His faithful promise to His holy Child, "I have both glorified it, and I will glorify it again."

Nowhere else, perhaps, could we find so long a train of sentiment, in so brief a compass, so perfectly brought out. We are taught, not by words, but by this lesson from our Lord's life, how the lowliness of a holy heart passes, by natural transition, into the strength of God. It is in the power of us all to parallel in our own experience the first links of this chain. We may all know something of the self-distrust, the shrinking, the weakness and the tears: shall we not follow the way of faith, and self-surrender, and prayer,

until we too find ourselves resting within the "glory of God"? Well did the Lord say of himself, that he was not only the Life, *but the Way*; for he has shown us the connections even of our feebleness and our fears with the almighty help of God, and the Heavenly Guide is with us in the "trouble of our soul" as in its joy, in the depths as in the elevations of our nature. It is not, indeed, because we wish to establish a connection between any unspiritual weakness of ours and the *humanity* of Christ, or would cover any unchastened feebleness in us by claiming for it fellowship *with him*, that we rejoice in this full record of his feelings, and that he offers to join us to him on his way to God from that level of emotion in which we can all participate,—but because he exhibits what we call our weaknesses as the very elements out of which God makes strength—because he teaches us to be no longer ashamed of our tremblings of heart, or even of our tears of apprehension—and that, instead of hardening ourselves against these true forewarnings of the Spirit, this only safe timidity of the Will, we should not dare to peril our souls in the outward temptation until we had first gone through this internal conflict, entered into counsel with our feebleness in the presence of God, and won from it the promise that in the day of our trial it shall not unexpectedly rise up and betray our holiest purpose. These are the preparatory tremblings, the shrinkings of nature, the despondencies

of heart, for which God makes His grace sufficient ; these the times and the experiences when He perfects His strength in our weakness. Meet your weakness within your own spirit, and not for the first time when the effort has to be made in the face of trial : within your own bosom, where yet the outward foe has not come, carry on the struggle with nature, with humility, with fear, it may be with indolence and apathy of heart : let our weakness and our strength meet in secret and reason together ; and if, out of that full conference between ourselves and the Holy Spirit, there issues the aspiration of Sacrifice, the resolve of Duty, we may calmly trust that in the time of need God will not be wanting to those who, knowing that they have no strength but in Him, have cast themselves upon Him. Oh, blessed is he who cometh in the name of the Lord, when he thus teaches us to make the very tremblings and apprehensions of nature the surest preparations for receiving a strength not our own in moments of difficult Duty !

If it had been otherwise—if Jesus had assumed to be his own Providence—if he had not taken it for all his work on earth *to receive the Mind of God*—if he had had no trust in the Love and Guidance of a Heavenly Father, in a Light in which there is no darkness at all—he must have permitted the prompting of nature, "Save me from this hour!" to have gone into effect. What would not have been lost if in

that one case the providence of man had supplanted the Providence of God! Everything that has perpetuated his name, that has made him the Image of God in human nature, glorifying his Father by enabling us in the face of Christ to see Him as He is from age to age. Let nature's momentary cry, "Save me from this hour!" have had way, and the revelation of a perfected Son is lost for ever, God's Image in human nature is withdrawn from mortal eyes, the Cross disappears from Calvary, and with it the all-suffering Love, the divine Patience, the filial Peace, which are the Christ's peculiar honours—the glory of showing a filial mind, and therefore a perfect providence, through the deepest mysteries of discipline.

And, if God could not, without injuring the essential glory of the Christ, without stripping him of the honour that was involved in the very idea of his mission, have caused that cup to pass from him—if, in our Lord's words, *it was "not possible,"* without the sacrifice of all that he now is, to have saved him from that hour of trembling and despondency, is not the same faithful Providence over us also, the same God of Light, in whom there is no darkness at all—and in some "trouble of soul," when we are ready to shrink and pray that God would save us from that dread hour, ought we not to recollect that He cannot do it without injuring our true blessedness to as great an extent as He would have injured the glory of the

Lord, if His Providence had hearkened to the first suggestions of troubled nature, and left unfinished the divine perfection He was forming, by withholding the after great occasions of Christ's life and death! It is well that we have the record of this "trouble of soul," that we may learn from Christ, what we could not learn from ourselves, how sacred our humanity is even in its fears, and what holy warnings it gives—that we should know how all such weakness passes into strength, that the mission of all such "trouble of soul" is to call beforehand the power of God into the heart, when alone we can be weak without being vanquished, where alone our weakness can prepare the way for victory—and that though we should tremble as Christ did, we can claim no fellowship with Christ unless also, as Christ did, we surrender our tremblings to the suggestions of God's Spirit—"For this cause came I to this hour: Father, glorify Thy name!" We have very little command over the circumstances in which we may be called by God to bear our part—unlimited command over the temper of our souls, but next to no command over the outward forms of trial. The most energetic will cannot order the events by which our spirits are to be perilled and tested. Powers quite beyond our reach—death, accident, fortune, another's sin—may change in a moment all the conditions of our life. With to-morrow's sun, existence may have new and awful aspects for any of us. We

know nothing but that in this disposition of things we are called to show a filial heart, the equal mind of Christ—that "*for this cause came we to this hour*"—and that if we put it away from us we may be putting away a glory, a purpose of our Father's Love as great towards *us* as our Lord would have put away if he had not turned from nature's instinct to the grace of God.

And God glorifies His Name upon this earth as often as He makes a human soul the image of Himself—as often as His Providence has the witness of a child of His faithful to our spiritual lineage—upholding in the midst of the world the pattern of a life, divine in its faith, immortal in its scope and expectation, heavenly in its temper and its law. As the Father of Spirits His highest glory must be to make all spirits see Him as He is, that they may become like unto Himself. By what steps He is to lead us to that knowledge : through what shaded ways His Providence may have to conduct us : by what fiery trials our souls are to be purified : by what crucifixions we are to be wrought to a heavenly temper, it is not given to us to know. In every moment of life we have only to pray, "Father, glorify Thy Name : for this cause came I to this hour."

Happy they whose past experience tells them to be of good courage ! Happy they who can remember how former moments of mortal weakness issued in heavenly strength—and when new fears and new

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tremblings lead on to the new resolve of Duty, the new prayer to God to do with us as He will, only to glorify His own Name, can hear in their own hearts some blessed whisper of the words, "I have both glorified it, and I will glorify it again."

XXI.

Spiritual Counterparts to Temptation and Despondency.


HEB. xii. 12, 13:

“Lift up the hands that hang down, and the feeble knees; and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.”

To one who observed mankind in a spirit of religious faith, expecting to find God the hidden Strength of every heart, nothing could be more surprising than the general absence of joyousness, of serene, cheerful, hopeful and elevated Life, looking to the eternal consummations. That men desire their own happiness, even to excess, is constantly asserted; yet how rarely do we find a man who, with his tenderest sympathies alive and true, can yet clear the trouble from his brow, the mystery from his soul, and live in helpful expectation! How seldom do we resolve with ourselves that we will banish fear, distrust, unspiritual sorrows, and pass our days in hope, patience, trustful endeavour, as those who at every moment have access to the springs of strength in God, and even in vanished blessings,

now hidden from sight, find the most living seeds of faith !

The men of whom you hear that they are lovers of their own happiness, when you come to speak to them will perhaps overwhelm you with their griefs ; or, if too sensitive for that, you have only to look into their faces to read the expression of habitual discontent. Now, ungodliness may be shown not in sin only, but in a heart that is full of fear and disquietude because it is not stayed upon God ; and if a tree is known by its fruit, the fruit of the Spirit is not Righteousness only, but also Joy and Peace. Certainly neither the natural desire for joy which exists in all men, nor the spirit of religion as it is conceived amongst us, produces a healthy and hopeful serenity, a cheerful activity, a glad endeavour, a simple, unconscious heroism, a looking to Him who cannot disappoint, and has given so many pledges, with eyes of ever-wistful Hope. The world is full, not of suffering only nor of sympathy with suffering—for *these* are from God and for good—but of a much worse thing—of depression, of fear, of sighing and lamentation, of the weakness and the piteousness of suffering. Even sympathy has so narrowed its meaning, that it hardly conveys any other idea than that of sensibility to another's sorrow ; and to rejoice with those who rejoice is considered the part rather of constitutional good-heartedness, of natural than of spiritual fellowship. Men will detail




their small troubles as if there was no sin in adding to the burdens of existence, no shame or selfishness in needlessly saddening the hearts of the tender ; or if they do not speak, they carry into public the air of their most private cares ; their sad countenances proclaim their woes, and present silent petitions for compassion.

Yet this is not always the fruit of self-love ; and if it was, the complaint of selfish men when they have missed—as they always will miss—the happiness which is the object of a selfish existence, when through seeking their life they lose it, might be left for correction to its natural retribution. It is the despondency that has its roots in unworthy conceptions of God that assumes the form of a fatal spiritual disease, as when even religious men confound the suffering which they are told is divine instruction with the high feelings which should meet it, and forget that if blessed are the mourners, yet that the blessedness is not in the mourning, but in the being comforted. Religion has become so closely and so truly identified with the discipline of sorrow, that afflicted minds, though not rising into faith, energy, self-forgetfulness, or any form of Christian heroism, are yet not without the impression that to wear the hue of sorrow is in some way to be marked by the approving finger of God. That men should sink in the struggle of life through the weakness of their

spiritual nature, that they should give over the effort to withstand visible calamity, to support a clear, bright faith in the midst of so many terrible circumstances, and to our merely natural eyes the seeming unfeelingness of God, however mournful, could create no surprise: but the evil has a deeper root: this spiritual sickliness is not altogether faithless practice, but very largely perverted religion—and not strength, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, but a wan pathos and sorrow have become intimately associated with piety and God. There is no error more insidious, more allied to unspiritual views of religion, more likely to generate and nourish selfishness in man, though not springing from it.

It has happened here, as elsewhere, that we have confounded means with ends, the agencies which God employs with the spiritual frames which God is seeking to create. Suffering is indeed a great and mysterious instrument in God's hands, but until the suffering is subordinated in the response of the soul, the connection with God is not yet established. We must not convert suffering into a substitute for the answer it should elicit, the power it should develope, as if in itself it was a mark of God's grace. Again, the misery of the world, meeting us everywhere, excites a deep and troubled compassion; and a mournful sensibility to existing wretchedness is mistaken for the right state of feeling towards it; whereas the faith



that there is no evil in God's world without its remedy, and the toil of beneficence never without its reward which that faith creates, and with mourning mingles unsought exhilaration out of God's abounding grace, are the fitting spiritual counterparts. Not the brooding shadow of misery, but all the glow and elevation that belong to faith and effort when they are directed against it, make the true worship of Sorrow. The best preservative against the melancholy that attends the contemplation of affliction is in the activity that relieves it—as the restless, discontented Sybarite, on making acquaintance with the real misery of the world, finds for the first time a divine peace enter into his heart, because for the first time forgetting himself and living in the spirit of a generous excitement. There is no sorrow that we cannot contemplate with faith and hope if we will only place ourselves in beneficent relations towards it, for it is impossible to think that God is regardless of that for which *we* are full of helpfulness and mercy.

Again, our common theology has connected dejection with piety. Exaggerated views of human sinfulness have made us tremble at the presumption of standing up before our Creator and blessing Him for existence. Even the gratitude which would freely break out of our hearts is discoloured by the dread sense of unworthiness, personal or constitutional, which theology tells us should form the leading element in

the thanksgiving of so sinful a being. The child whose willing hymn would be joy and praise, is taught first to fear, to smite upon its breast, and cry, God be merciful! I have just been told of a child, a very infant, who under the teaching of its mother has its sleep broken in the night with bursts of weeping and terror for the sinfulness of its nature. Though outward sacrifices have ceased, the sacrifice of trembling is still demanded, and parents make their children pass through these fires as to Moloch. Even to be happy amidst His gifts is looked upon as an offence to the Most High, as if we were forgetting our dependence and presuming to be sufficient to ourselves. A shade of fear crosses us in moments of joyful life, lest God should be displeased at the too confident freedom of our being, and, except we pause and make a sacrifice, will speedily recal us to a sense of what we are, and visit us in anger. Some traces of such superstition, some thoughts of a jealous God, lurk in most hearts, depriving us of a Father, and converting religion into tremulous self-regard. A true filial piety would suggest to us that the freedom of a hopeful being, unchecked by terror, was not forgetfulness of God, but a child's full trust in His faithfulness and mercy, combined with some just conceptions of the elevations of His nature.


Here, then, are great evils: Religion embittered or saddened at its springs—an impression that happy

life is not godly life—a fear that a cheerful spirit must partake of the levity of the world, or of the insensibility of the selfish, or of a presumptuous forgetfulness of our condition of dependence—and these evils elevated into pieties, rooted in false sentiment, sanctified by a perversion of the doctrine that suffering is divine experience, and by a distortion of the fact that the Christ was a Man of Sorrows.

Our first duty is to get rid of enfeebling sentiment, to place at least the true spirit of the religious life in clear light before us, whatever may be the difficulties of abiding in it—that there be no roots of bitterness mistaken for divine seed and sedulously fostered—that at least we know that God has placed fountains of joy and comfort in our nature, whether we have the faith and virtue to keep them open and flowing, or not—and that we deceive not our own hearts by mistaking sorrow for heavenly-mindedness, and chastening for the peaceable fruits of righteousness to those who are exercised thereby.

What, then, is Religion regarded as the fruit of the root faith, the informing spirit, of our life? Trust, work, holy courage, hope unfailling, war against all evil in the faith that God is with us and wills us to be victors, righteousness, peace, joy in the Holy Spirit. Whatever are our sorrows, unless these have been their fruits, we have as yet been stricken in vain. If you ask, Why does God expose you to affliction if He

wishes always for a cheerful heart? you might as well ask, Why does He expose you to temptation if He wishes you always to be holy? He wishes our spirit to have its joy and strength in the life of faith, the life of the soul, and not to hang on accident. God subjects us to suffering that we may be downcast, no more than He subjects us to temptation that we may sin. The two cases are in all respects analogous: and if you argue that abounding sorrow and calamity are the signs of God's Will that the religion of our life should wear only the meek hue of a wan and broken spirit, you may equally argue that abounding temptations must be followed by concession or monkery, and that defeat, or flight, of the soul is the counterpart to the evil that is in the world. But it is not so: evil in the world is God's summons to all holy thoughts and faithful works, to the protection of prayer against it, the aggression of love upon it; and sorrow and suffering are equally God's summons to patience, serenity, heavenly-mindedness, the life hidden in Him, the peace that passeth understanding, never cut off from hope, for never cut off from God. Unless we are prepared to maintain that provocation justifies anger—that ingratitude is rightly followed by vindictive resentment—that passion and opportunity lead legitimately to indulgence and sin—and so of every form of temptation and its counterpart of evil,—we may not plead that the misery that is in the world,




the calamity that is in our own life, have their rightful consequents in a broken and bowed-down heart ; or that fear and trembling, despair and anguish, the long arrest of peace and joy, can be the intended fruits of any visitation of God.

Will it be said, that no one so argues, that no one so mistakes "the worship of Sorrow," as to confound passive acceptance of grief with a spiritual offering? What means, then, the plaintive note that almost everywhere is the undertone of our life,—what means that frequent experience, which yet always comes with a painful surprise, that the nearer you approach a man's secret life the less hopeful do you find him, sighing for support, oppressed with the burden and the mystery of existence,—that hardly can a man be found who will confess that, whatever may be his trials, he either sees his way through the darkness of the world, and has strength equal to his day, or that, when he sees it not, he can walk with his hand in the Hand of God? What means the almost universal profession of care and anxiety, as something to be hugged and proud of—the direction of sympathy to our weakness rather than to our strength—and the limitation of Religion itself to the suggestion of comfort, the lowest of its offices—comfort, the lowest thing we look for if it is sought directly and for its own sake—the highest thing that comes to us when it comes by surprise, the unsought fruit of spiritual life, the bless-

ing on heavenly-mindedness, which God "*adds unto*" those who seek first the kingdom of heaven and His righteousness? Is there no sign in all this that men treat afflictions as if in *them* were the distinguishing stigmata of Christ, and that peace and joy are not what we naturally look for as the marks of a religious life? Is it possible that this succumbing to sorrow belongs to those who know that its divine fruit is the elevation, and serenity, and unsuspended beneficence of Christ, and that faith in God can have no natural result but an earnest life of Hope, and a quiet heart of Peace? I deprecate the misunderstanding that I am forgetting, or insensible to, the awful weight of sorrow that is in the world, or in the individual heart. If I am silent about it, it is only because there need no words to give it emphasis. I only say that God, and our life in God, life in the spirit of His Love, is our refuge, and that either there is a mistake as to the spiritual frames affliction ought to elicit,—or there is indulgence in passive sorrow in the face of a diviner knowledge. Is it the case that the evil is entirely one of faithless practice, and that all hearts are purged of that root of bitterness, that there is something devout and sainted in wearing the hue of tribulation, and keeping in subjection the instincts of joy?

Wherein, then, is the blessedness of those that mourn? Christ says, in being "comforted"—in the victory of their faith—in the endurance of love, trust and



patience—in the untroubled answer of the spiritual nature to the questioning of circumstance ; and until we are thus comforted we are not one with our Leader, nor in communion with our Father's Spirit. It would be well for us to remember, as one of the many lessons that are deposited for us in the language we employ, that comfort means strength, and that the Comforter is the Strengthener. No one who is not lost in superstition will suppose that the blessing of affliction consists in the *suffering* it brings. It consists in the spiritual response to suffering of one whose confidence in the supreme Source of Love and Goodness cannot thus be overcome ; it consists in the Angels of peace that came to strengthen Christ, when he was willing to drink the cup, that God might glorify His own name. Neither God nor Christ give any countenance to the *ascetic* spirit, that suffering is to be accepted or desired for its own sake. The sacrifices of Love are dear to God ; but the sacrifices of Self-love, in quest of its own salvation, are not of His exacting. To meet suffering and sacrifice to any extent that we may carry blessing and joy to others, or bear their burdens, is to be in the spirit of God and the fellowship of Christ ; but to apply to ourselves a voluntary discipline of pain or pensiveness, not for the sake of others, nor incurred in their behalf, but for the sake of recommending *ourselves* to God, is a very deadly form of self-love and a frightful superstition. Beneficence,

and the sorrow whose issue is sympathy, need and will employ all the self-sacrifice we are capable of: to spend it on ourselves is to spoil the husbandry of God.

But is there nothing *divine* in lasting sorrow—nothing in it that may befit a child of God, living in union with the Father's Spirit? Yes, in all sorrow that has its root in Love, and is compatible with faith and hope in God, and into which, whatever unutterable yearnings enter, there yet enters no self-indulgent helplessness, no abandonment, no despair. A heart that never sorrowed would be a heart that never loved. A heart that sighed after nothing would be a heart from which God had never taken the dearest thing He had given: only let the sigh feed the hope, and rise into holier life instead of sinking into self-pitying. Religion sanctions and sanctifies every sorrow that belongs to pure affections; but all such sorrow, consisting in the memory of some blessed experience, gives its distinctest shape to Christian expectation, and never can become wretched until, without the trust of gratitude for what has been, it has ceased to be religious, without hope and without God in the world.

Are there then no afflictions which a religious mind may be excused if it meets only with submission and resignation, unmixed with loftier issues? Must not patience only, but also comfort and peace, wait upon sorrows which no earthly hopes attend? A prostrate

body, that can never be equal to the common work, or know the common bliss of life—set apart, as by a word from on high, from the daily affairs of men, who are heard at a distance by the solitary one as if rushing past his grave—uncertain reason, oppressed and fluttering—hideous moral evil brought very close to you, clinging to those who colour your existence—the lightning of God falling on your household tent out of a cloudless sky—the invisible Hand laid without warning on those who make the strength of your strength, the life of your life—are *these*, things to be encountered not only with serene and tranquil faith, but also to evoke new spiritual life? Of their awful severity there is no question : but how are they to be met? What, in regard even to these, is the answer of the spirit? And surely it implies something very hollow to speak of meeting these sad aspects of existence with submission and resignation, but without peace or hope or newness of life ; for if there is no hope, no trust, no call, *why should there be* submission or resignation, except as the stoic's yielding to necessity, which is not piety, but prudence? Whence will relief come, such true and divine relief as spiritual insight brings? "Lift up the hands that hang down, and the feeble knees; and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame should be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed." This may be hard—that is not to be denied ; but is it right, just, holy, lovely—a

demand upon the faith that works by love, which the abounding goodness of God, with His clear indications of eternal purpose, entitles Him to make ?

But it is said that Christ was characteristically a Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief. Yes; but interpret this aright. He was a Man of Sorrows in no sense which implies that fear, or distrust, or spiritual lassitude had entered into him. A good man will bear all men's griefs, until he has borne them away. Sorrows, disappointments, were around him, moulding him on all sides, the element in which his strength was made, his life lived; but love, faith, hope, the joy of the soul in God, were the inspirations from which they came, and to which they rose. It is entirely a false impression that the designation, a Man of Sorrows—one indeed of no authoritative application to the individual person of Christ—describes the hue of his sentiments. It is spiritually impossible that one who led his life of love and prayer should ever be long out of God's clear sunlight; and if we search his history, there is nothing more evident than that gloom or asceticism made no part of the temper of his soul. We remember the reproach, whence it came, and how it was met: The Son of Man is come eating and drinking: why do the disciples of John *fast* often and make prayers, and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees; *but thine eat and drink?* And he said unto them: "Why should the children of the bride-chamber fast while the Bride-

groom is with them?" There is indeed ever some sadness in all aspiration that has not yet attained; but he who was made perfect by suffering never could succumb to suffering, nor permit the sense of it to be dominant in his nature. We hear twice, perhaps three times, in all that tasked life of a cloud passing over his mind, floating between him and God, and each time no sooner is mention of it made than we are introduced to the fountains of his strength, and behold him taking instant refuge with the Source of peace. In the most suffering moments of his life, suffering never gives the direction to his feelings nor suggests his thoughts. When he is departing from the temple for the last time, the Rejected for ever, he sees the widow with her mite—the beauty of the offering takes possession of his heart, and instead of mourning for himself, he is blessing *her*. At the Last Supper no word of sorrow is breathed by *him*—no fear but for the imperfect fidelity of those whom on the morrow he was to leave to their own strength—whilst the sorrow of the disciples is gently reproved as far from the occasion: "Let not your hearts be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me." "Peace I leave with you: my peace I give unto you." "If you loved me ye would rejoice, because I go unto my Father." Whilst bearing his own cross, there is solicitude for others, but peace for himself: "Women of Jerusalem! weep not for me; weep for yourselves and for your children;"

and on the cross itself all suffering leads to the suggestions of mercy, the prayer of forgiveness, the last directions of love, the consciousness of being perfectly safe in the hands of God. When, then, we call Christ the Man of Sorrows, let us remember what we mean : that he was one whose spiritual nature suffering never ruled—whose peace, hope and love, sorrow could perfect, but could not disturb—not a dejected and pensive, but a strong and untroubled man, full of the spirit of Power and of God. He passed through the fulness of sorrow as he passed through the fulness of temptation, and had the brightness of his spiritual love dimmed by neither.

But he who was so strong himself was ever of the quickest tenderness both to the griefs and to the weaknesses of others: and this is just the test that we must apply to ourselves if we would know whether indeed it is God that is sustaining us, and that there is no hardness mingling with our strength. And the more we feel that it is part of our fellowship with *him* to meet our life with cheerful energy, and, except in a spirit of loving sympathy, to carry our burden to no man's door, to shadow no man's tenderness of heart by the needless exposure of a grief which with God's help we can quell within our own—the more we are impressed by the spiritual duty of standing up in this troubled world, with the arrows of God flying all around us, trustful and hopeful men—the more shall

we be ready to become the supports of whatever sorrows need our sympathies—to grasp the hands that hang down and raise them up—to place ourselves in love and self-forgetfulness near the weak and the desolate. We can only give what we have: we cannot give to another the strength that is not our own. “Labour,” says St. Paul, “that ye may have to give to him that needeth.” “Blessed be God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them that are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.” The sympathy of two dejected, repining minds is but a commerce of self-love. It was he whose own foot was firm upon the rushing wave who was both able and willing to stretch forth his hand to the fearful and the sinking. But no man whose heart is Christian will make the hope and courage he desires for himself a condition of his sympathy, his helpfulness towards others. If the strong man turns away from the weakness of the weak, he only proves that such strength as he has is hardness and self-concentration, far indeed from tender reverence for God’s holy purposes, and the spirit of him who would not quench smoking flax, or break a bruised reed. If “it is more blessed to give than to receive,” the blessedness of having is in being able and willing to give.

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Children, then, of the God of all comfort, and brothers of every suffering man, we live true to our spiritual lineage, to the family bonds of Christian hearts, only as we go to our Father for light and strength, and "turn not away from our own flesh," but share what is ours, and take of theirs, as God has given to each for the sake of all.

XXII.

Loving God with our Strength.

I COR. xvi. 13:


“ Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit ye like men, be strong.”

A MAN of strong character is one whose Will rules his powers, so that such energies as he has are habitually submissive to the clear purpose of his spirit. And to this kind of strength, which lies entirely within the province of self-government, every man may approach, however little natural force he may have comparatively with other men. The strength that is required is moral strength, and has no relation to another man's capacities, but solely to our own. Some natures, indeed, much more readily than others, seem to have all their forces under the command of what is highest in them ; but the question for each of us is, not whether we are more or less than others, nor whether the work given to us is lighter or severer, but how can we best improve the gifts of God committed to ourselves—how introduce a full harmony of action into the constituents of our own being, each part of us serving in its rightful place.

A clear, fixed aim, and a force of will that compels the various faculties to steady work in its service, these constitute, for each individual, strength of character. For the difficulty of reaching true strength of character is not in great exertions, but in unity of life. Nothing is more common than great force in some one direction—in some one inclination, passion or faculty : nothing is more rare than a strong man, if by the man you mean the whole man, the symmetry of our entire being, the frame of our life complete through that which every joint supplieth. The men whom the world takes for strong are for the most part only one-sided—just as to most minds the half of a truth is far more telling than the whole of it, and to modify the impression by giving the other half will seem to round it off to comparative tameness. Vehement language coming out of half-knowledge and a blind impulse, seems fraught with more vigour than full, just, discriminating speech ; and a man who sees every side of a subject will appear more feeble than the man who, because he sees but one side of it, can speak impetuously and strike with unqualified force. How easy would it be to be strong in some one direction or proclivity of our nature, or in the vigorous prosecution of single interests ! How easy, for instance, to be strong in the conduct of worldly business, if we might settle down our whole powers upon it, and had never to lift our soul from its pursuit ! How difficult


is it to combine this with every other sentiment that becomes a man—to infuse into this vigour of business the fervent spirit serving God, so that, whilst the hand of diligence maketh rich, the heart and its treasures have no earthliness in them ! How easy might it be to be strong in Religion, in the devotion of our souls to holiness and truth, if Duty centred in the private thoughts and could be carried on in solitude—if it required no struggle with conflicting things, no trained wisdom to discern our way amid a thousand complications—if asceticism was strength—if monkery was strength—if the anchorite might go to his cell, and had finished his Christian work when prayers, aspirations and unearthly desires, had floated in ghostly array through the uninterrupted meditations of his spirit ! All that is easy to any one who chooses to give himself to it. But how difficult is it to be strong in a real devotedness to Goodness, Purity and Truth, amid the contradiction of circumstance and the opposing ways of men—to shape the forms of life after models in the soul—to transfer unmutilated our own sentiments into our own demeanour—to live with men as they are and part with no ideal—to lose no vision, disturb no fountain of peace—to be strong in Christ's interpretation of strength—a physician among the sick—whole among the unsound—spiritual among the worldly—living with God in the midst of crowds—full of love and thought for the world when alone with God !

Now this difficulty of living true to our *whole* nature, including our highest promptings, has always been felt ; but it is spoken of as calamity, as the sign of our human infirmity, as the mark on us of a spiritual degradation, instead of what it really is, the divine distinction of our being, the only possible way of approach towards the All-perfect. Men speak of this difference between religion in the thoughts and religion incarnate—between religion disembodied and religion embodied—as if the removal of the natural difficulty would be the most blessed thing that could happen to them ; whereas, if the removal took place in any other way than by the well-earned victory of a faithful Will, it would abolish our distinction as spiritual beings, strip us of personal power, of voluntary goodness, of voluntary devotedness, and reduce us, like the other creatures of God, under the fatality of nature and the necessary directions of our own constitution. We are slow to recognize our spiritual blessings, our peculiar privileges, when they come in the form of grave responsibilities, of high and sacred trusts : we would have the faith of Abraham without its trials ; we would have our souls taken away and their place supplied by instincts ; even our most distinguished man of science wishes he could be wound up like a clock every morning, to go right for twenty-four hours ; we deplore the long intervening contest between the kingdom of heaven in a child's heart and




its practical attainment in a man's life ; but take the struggle away, and you take with it the spirit that chooses between good and evil, the Will that solicited to ease and pleasure keeps its fellowship with God, places itself within the protection of the Highest, and banishes temptation by the presence of the Holy Spirit. Here, and nowhere else, is the explanation of all the evil we are exposed to. Our natural liability to temptation, our severe struggle upwards, is not a mark of degradation, it is a mark of spiritual rank. Suppose that we unfolded our higher nature under a direct fatality—suppose that the sentiment conducted to the deed as the instinct to its end—that we hungered and thirsted for righteousness with an uncontrollable appetite which our own will could not restrain or destroy, as we hunger and thirst for food by a constitutional necessity—then, however high might be the order of our instincts, we never in this way could become "*Children of God*," or know what it was to share His holy Will. If we were obedient only as the stars are obedient, as with perfect practical knowledge the bee builds its cell and the bird of passage keeps its time—if with *us*, as with *them*, there was no possibility of sin, there could be no sonship with God, no righteousness of God in man, and human obedience would have as little to do with spiritual goodness, would depend as absolutely on the simple *fiat* of the Almighty, as the material order of nature, or the animal perfection of an eagle.

What, indeed, constitutes us *spiritual* beings, accountable for our own peace, for the issues, the issues in character, of the mingling passions, sufferings, struggles and desires, which, unseen by the world, are yet our secret experience? How is it that Conscience, within the circle of real joys and woes, the interior quiet or unrest of the heart, makes every man to feel that he moves a preserver or a destroyer, a self-made or a self-blighted being? Is it not that God of Himself so inspires our souls that with commanding authority there rise before us images of goodness better than we are, and inviting us to be what as yet we are not? And, again, as Christians, that these images of diviner life not only pass through our thoughts, but have been brought home to us, face to face, in a son of Man, so that we cannot deny their reality, or that they have rightful judgment over us, even as the words of Christ judge every man whose conscience they have reached? "I judge no man; the words that I have spoken, the same will judge you in the last day." And who can deny the right of a word of divine truth witnessed to by our own souls, and incarnated in one who was "touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and in all points tempted even as we are," to pronounce our condemnation if we disobey it? Yet these higher suggestions of God in us will not execute what they image: if left to themselves they will only mingle with all other impulses, and



become elements in the general disorder of our being. God and man must become fellow-workers. God's part is to inspire us: man's part is to honour the inspiration. We have our part to do in the salvation of our own souls, and it is to lend ourselves with all the strength we have to what our conscience commends to us as the Will of God. And here mainly lies the difference between spiritual weakness and spiritual strength—not so much in our desires as in our will, for often our desires are right when our will is powerless, and our desires are but the breathings of God in us asking to be taken up into our life. A man spiritually strong has a *conscientious* will. The measure of his natural inspiration, so to speak, the constitutional susceptibility of his being, may not be great; in intellect, in ideality, he may be a mere child in comparison with some self-indulgent man of genius; but spiritually *he* is the strong man, and the other is the yielding child. Take a strong man and a weak man, a successful man and an unsuccessful: in the desires of their hearts there may be no discernible difference. But the weak man yields to his miscellaneous impulses, to the accidental solicitings of the external world, to the chance wanderings of his own faculties. The conscientious man knows that to do that is to surrender all individuality, all personal liberty, all that makes a man independent of the waft of circumstance, all that gives a man the power of


doing the Will of God. It is in the feebleness of the Will that most of us sink the natural fruits of God's good Spirit working in us. Few of us are men of corrupt hearts ; but most of us are men of feeble spiritual purpose. How few of us have any clear spiritual aim before us at which we are constantly working, though it was only the weeding out of our nature our known infirmities, our known liabilities to evil,—weeding them out, or rather killing them out, by leaving no room for them in a soil that is sown with better seed ! How many of us are shorn of our strength by some mere habit, against which we resolve and perhaps pray ; but the Will being feeble through inaction, when the temptation comes again the yielding nature, unused to resistance, once more passively submits ! Weak men pray that temptations never may return : strong men pray that as often as they return they may have strength to starve them. How many of us are well aware of our own deficiencies—of how feebly, it may be, we are furnished with the very wealth and discipline of mind which our place most needs—of how often difficulties and opportunities are arising, incidental to the very matters with which we profess to deal, which we know that we are not competent to meet with a full understanding and a masterly ability ! We even plan our tasks and lay out our course of work to supply what we painfully know to be wanting ; but we are not equal to the fatigue of a long and distant



purpose, and the capacities unused to constraint soon struggle to be released, that unreined they may go loose according to their own pleasure. This is the case with thousands, whose desires are pure, whose hearts are good, who are even oppressed with a sense of their own removable imperfections, but who have never acquired the power of putting their own faculties under the dominion of their own will, and are therefore every hour at the mercy of unguided directions of their nature. Sensations, memories, imaginations, impulses, bodily restlessness, start up at random and draw them after them. They accomplish nothing, for in the feebleness of their self-control any accident is strong enough to call them away. Their whole being is a miscellaneous confusion. They float upon every current that offers, and make no channels for themselves. The Will becomes totally helpless in the midst of its undisciplined instruments: the image of their own life, of their inward being, grows painful to themselves, for it is a picture of disorder, and they fall into chronic discontent—or they do what so many do, they take refuge in an external life,—the world, with its infinite variety, carries them from object to object, and pleasantly consumes their time without in any way tasking their strength.

The life of average men is an imperfect effort of the Will against this dominion of outward solicitations, and the unmastered condition of their own powers. The


victory remains permanently on neither side. We summon energy to do some special work which presses, that we may be dismissed to relaxation with a conscience quieted for the time. We get through the day's necessities, but for the most part never even propose to ourselves the true problem of our being, the reduction of our faculties and passions under the command of our Will, so as to make them ministering servants to the spiritual purpose of our life. So far as we *have* a scheme of life within which our Will does reign—as in our callings, in our professions, in our amusements, in our favourite pursuits, in our affections—it is for the most part too limited to include our whole nature. We may have great power over some of our faculties for special service, and leave the rest unused. Many a philosopher has his intellect perfectly obedient, but never has acquired command over his temper and his passions. Many a gentle heart has perfectly subdued its passions, but can now by no effort concentrate the mind, or hold the thoughts for an hour together within the same channel. Many a mechanician, many a musician, will work miracles with his hands, or with the organs of his voice, but have nothing else that belongs to him under his control. And *religious* men often construct their religion out of a few of the lower elements of religious sensibility, and never apply their Will, in their care of the soul, to the development of the full image of the



Divine nature in them. The anomaly is by no means rare of strong religious sensibilities existing in connection with a very feeble conscientiousness. The religion of many natures is only a sense of dependence and a desire for protection—it is born of our weakness and seeks support—it proceeds from the emotions of physical wonder, of awe and timid apprehension, and that often vehement love which is passionately grateful for undeserved mercies and for averted dangers ; but it may comprise no aspiration of the soul, no desire for holiness, no hunger and thirst of the spirit after righteousness, after the living God, and so can combine a passionate devotion with flagrant imperfections of temper and of life. Such natures, with some of the lower sensibilities in excess, and the more spiritual ones undeveloped, are the main supports of all that is superstitious in religion. They seize with avidity on Schemes of Salvation, on the special remedies, disciplines, beliefs, oblations, rituals, recommended as the patent medicines of diseased souls. The religion they desire is not one that will educate their strength, but one that will remove their fears,—and specially accommodate itself to what they assume to be the weakness of nature. How few of us reach, or set before us *to be* reached, that last and perfect state, “the spirit of power and of love, and of a sound mind,” when struggle is over, the righteous Will acts freely, and no forced discipline needed, for all that is

in us breathes with one consent! This is the beauty of Holiness, the crowning reward of the faithful. Wonders of patience, love and self-control, are performed in God's free spirit. The authority of Conscience has become habitual, and now rules as with the serenity of an assured command that never knew the weariness of conflict, the storms of passion, the revolts of caprice and sensibility. Even the energy of a holy Will, still required for the onward way, is no longer prominent, for effort disappears as resistance dies away. This is the end of our prayers, the goal of our way—that the Will of God should be done on earth, even as it is done in heaven, by willing spirits.

Now it is a conscientious Will, through the power it unquestionably has over our states of voluntary attention, directing it towards some objects and calling it away from others, that enables us at last to “watch, to stand fast in the faith, and to acquit us like strong men.” We can, when we will, determine the interests that shall be held before our minds. In every moment that we are masters of our own time, we can choose to what objects our attention shall be invited, and from what it shall be withheld. It is this that makes us accountable for ourselves. It is the power of the Will over the attention that makes us responsible for the thoughts, and if for the thoughts, then for the passions and the purposes of our being, for passion and purpose die whenever the Will steadily refuses to permit the




thoughts to dwell upon their objects. And as the Will can thus kill evil purpose and passion, so can it feed and kindle all good desires by determining what thoughts and what beings shall be invited to dwell within our souls. This really is the difference between a disciplined and an undisciplined man: with the introduction of a conscientious Will commences the reign of individual holiness, of spiritual self-culture, of personal liberty and power. Of course, so far as force of Character is a natural gift, we are not censurable for a comparative deficiency; but we are answerable for the voluntary directions of our thoughts, for the results of that persistent attention to some interests and withdrawal from others which is at the command of our Will.

This power is greatly promoted by whatever brings the sense of obligation; and often the way to strengthen a feeble, impersonal mind is to weight it heavily with responsibilities. Hence the dangerous time of life is apt to be when the capacities are ready for action, with nothing as yet to turn them forcibly into one direction, to fix them in earnest work. How melancholy often is the waste of power between girlhood and womanhood! Life has often then no enforced work—there is no sphere of clear, determined duty: this “unchartered freedom” is too wide, and aimlessness ensues: long hours of uninterrupted leisure follow one another daily, but what is there

to define its employment? Life is like a sea on which floats a ship bound for no port. But there is a quick weariness in aimless drifting, and liberty becomes a burden when the higher demands of life are left unsatisfied. What wonder if they touch everything, and exhaust nothing! And where lies the remedy? Solely in a conscientious Will that chooses and persistently pursues some permanent object, or some large self-culture—some work that will not fail, that may be continued from day to day, every day deepening their tracks—some moral interest, some line of life, the thread of which need not be broken, but lead on, however gently, farther and farther—for not violent efforts, but only continuous ones, are demanded for the truest culture of our nature. Their place is in the centre of all that is human, and their first duty is to do what offers within their own circle; but it is a waste of life for a spiritual being not to have some large interest or purpose that can continuously be pursued in the leisure that God affords.

There is the correspondent period, when the worth of a man's life yet hangs in doubt—when he ought to ask himself before God what it is that he expects from existence, and entertain great thoughts of what may be open to him, if he does not spoil his future by early purposelessness and retributive incapacity. For there are golden opportunities in life if he will wait for them, and be found fit to seize them when they come: an



existence rich in all needful means, in all lawful power, for those who by purity, by self-control and patient growth, are ready when God calls. I suppose few men have passed middle life without feeling that great occasions have passed out of their hands because of deficiencies in what was abundantly possible to them ; perhaps because they had not laid wider and deeper the foundations of knowledge, and held the intellectual instruments more completely at command. We speak of the good fortune that appears in some men's lives ; but for the most part, the good fortune falls to the strong will, the patient diligence, the faithful preparation, that can use the opportunity and is equal to the time.

And let us live in no doubt of *what is strength* and *what is weakness*. It is strength to will and to do : it is weakness to desire and not to do—to wish and not to will—to wish to break a habit and still live in it—to wish to fix the thoughts and let them wander—to wish for the command of a faculty and to acquire no efficient use of it. And strength is not the vehement impulse of one part of us, but the final consent of all that is in us. It is not in the tenderness of a yielding man : nor in the resignation of a cold one : nor in the prudence of a selfish man : nor in the open-handedness of a spendthrift. The tender must be firm : the resigned, loving : the prudent, generous : the charitable, self-denying. It was seen in Christ when the morning

of his greatest glory dawned upon him—watching in trembling and in prayer—in his humility testing his weakness, and collecting his strength in God. Remember what he said to the disciples, who all failed him in that great crisis, not because their hearts were evil, but simply because their *Wills* were feeble: “What, could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

And let us not fall into the vulgar mistake that there is any strength in restless action, unless that action comes forth from earnest thoughtfulness and has been fed by the inspirations of God. There is a constitutional activity which is often weaker and poorer than silent contemplation. Have the devout strength of meditation that passes outwards into life when the heart muses till the fire burns. For then we are strong in the Lord and in the power of His might: feeling that He who inspires us will also endow us for that which He requires—that He asks no service for which He does not supply the sufficiency—and that to those who will yield themselves to do His Will, without self-seeking or ambition, “their strength is ever as their day.”

XXIII.

Disquiet of Spirit.


PSALM xlii. 5 :

“Why art thou cast down, oh my soul ! and why art thou disquieted within me ?”

THERE is a large amount of spiritual disquiet, of the causes of which the soul may be ignorant ; even as there is a large amount of bodily suffering having its origin in some invisible derangement of a frame fearfully and wonderfully made, in laws and conditions of health the existence of which is a mystery to the sufferer. A morbid condition of body is for the most part not occasioned by external stroke or violence ; its cause must be detected amid the complicated workings of the powers of life : and a morbid condition of spirit is for the most part not occasioned by assignable calamity, but by some defect of co-operative action in the springs of thought and feeling that make the sum of spiritual being. External injury, definable affliction, are our exceptional experiences : internal derangement, irregular exercise, disproportioned development of the powers of life, are *constant* sources of

uneasiness, permanent violations of the conditions on which God gives the fulness of peace.

There is another analogy of great practical importance between spiritual and bodily disquiet. In neither case will ignorance of the laws of health save us from the consequences of their violation. We may err unknowingly, but no less do the natural results ensue—no less has that suffering to be borne which is the natural issue of mistaken action. God in the natural world withholds no train of sorrowful effects because man incurs them unawares: if we touch the death-charged element, however innocently, no decree interposes to arrest the prompt instruction of a terrible experience; and though the spiritual penalty of sinfulness falls only on wilful transgression, yet if we fail to keep the conditions on which God gives quiet, our ignorance of what those conditions are will not affect the result: the fulness of peace is annexed to certain conditions and to no other, and the disturbance which visits involuntary imperfection is often our first index to a broken law. How often does it happen, both in the moral and in the economic world, that we knew not there was a vice in our state of being until it came to light in an issue of suffering, and we were made aware of the root of evil by the fruit of woe! It is the final cause of all such corrective fruit that we should act upon the warning and discover what law of God has been neglected. There is a physiology of



the soul as there is a physiology of the body, and in the spiritual department of health we must be our own care-takers ; the only physicians that can heal us speak in the still, small voice which is heard by those who listen with the spirit.


Who does not know from experience that there frequently come upon him states of inward unhingement and unrest, which he cannot account for through any dissatisfaction with his outward lot, or from any stroke of positive affliction ? The spirit is sick within, because of disorder—because of unobserved harmonies—because of inaction or over-action—through some organs stimulated to disease, and some disabled by neglect—because of unaccountable fever or lassitude. The laws of spiritual health require a nature equally exercised, with no part unworked or overworked—every faculty directed to its own object and receiving its own joy—keeping our peace full by every urn that is in mind, heart, soul and energy, having its own share, giving its own contribution of the waters of life. What St. Paul says of the necessity of each man making himself, in his place, a vital member of the social body, is equally true of the membership of each of the parts which together make up the individual,—that “the whole body, fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase unto the edifying of itself in Love”—Love,

pure Charity, an enthusiasm for Goodness in which all personal ends are lost, being the uniting principle of every perfect co-operation in which an orderly subordination must prevail. The anxious questioning of the uneasy spirit, not knowing itself—"Why art thou disquieted within me?"—thus points to neglected laws of life which need be no secrets to us. One or two—they are closely intertwined—of the sources of disquiet I shall attempt to exhibit.

And, first, the cold encouragement of Conscience—that uncomfortable thought of himself which, without distinctly realizing it, every man has who has a standard in his spirit that rebukes his life. There is no source of disquiet so constant as this—a sense of rupture between promise and performance: temper, habits, deeds, ways of life, not true to our souls—a glory in our thoughts, a meanness in ourselves—a two-fold existence, a lofty one from Him who inspires us, a low one in the inertia that resists Him. Few of us know how much we suffer from the absence of unconscious self-respect—how much the divine necessities of Conscience, of Righteousness and of Love, afflict us when they do not bless us—how, when refused the fellowship of our lives, they stand apart in awful loneliness and drop a cold shade of unaccordance, whose chill is felt when its source is not suspected. Few of us know to what an extent this puts a check upon our light-heartedness—how much of every-day happiness

is lost because Conscience will not give us its free smile—how much of innocent enjoyment is spoiled by an undefined sense of defalcation—the distrust of a soul not sufficiently at ease with God to feel a filial right to take His Love—to cast itself amid offered opportunities without a speck of cloud upon the confidence that with a full, fresh heart, it may use His mercies. Who has not felt the weary unprofitableness of an outwardly happy occasion, which some overcast of recent unworthiness rendered him incapable of enjoying? We cannot take the peace to our hearts as if it deserved to be there. And how often does this take place when we are not directly conscious of the spiritual cause! With a neglected task upon his thoughts, though he may think he is not thinking of it, what is any simple, innocent pleasure, the face of nature, the laughter of children, to a man whose heart these would have made perfectly pure and happy at a holier time! This is the effect of all burdens on the soul, conscious or unconscious: they spoil us for the daily goodness of God—we are not free to observe and enjoy such things. Again, who has not felt with what a glad heart he can enjoy the stray gifts of God, how entirely he can give himself up to opportunities of joy, when there hangs over him no doubting sense of dishonoured duty, and, in a spirit free to take what is freely given from above, there is added unto him a Beatitude for which he did not ask!

It is true, indeed, that every man falls below his standards, and that even if we did all that is our duty to do, we should still be unprofitable servants. It is no disgrace to us to be below our standards: it would be hopeless degradation to have no standard above ourselves. It is the law of life in us that we reach forth to things not yet attained, that a Christ shall dwell within us to keep us humble. Nor can this method of growth come to a natural end, for it has no limit but God: as often as we make any real advance, the prospect widens—we stand for our next gaze upon a higher eminence. It is not, then, in this necessary inferiority to our standards that the disquiet of Conscience has its source—it is that we do not press upon our standards so that they and we rise together—that unconsciously we are weary of ourselves—wearied of an unprofitable life—wearied of the involuntary conviction which saddens but does not brace us, that somehow we have erred and strayed from the right path—that we are not what we might have been—that there must have been clear times for doing something, and we did nothing—occasions *offering* themselves to our hands which we did not grasp—steps *opening* for us in which we did not walk—opportunities soliciting in vain. It is part of the punishment of a want of clear energy that in the end we come not to know where or how we missed our way.



And it may help us to find our path again—to pass clear out of the cold, forbidding shadow which Conscience drops upon all forms of unprofitable life—help us from a barren sense of being wrong into the way of getting right, if we distinctly recognize as the central cause of all spiritual disquiet powers unused, faculties unexercised, large parts of the rich field of our nature left waste and unproductive, with, it may be, a ruinous energy concentrated in some propensities. This is the danger that besets us all. Few of us are more than partially alive. “Let the *dead* bury the dead,” said our Lord, speaking of those who in the deadness of their souls were not fit to do spiritual work, to see spiritual meanings, in this world. We live upon some poor fraction of the great inheritance God has given us, and refuse our Father’s gifts. Our modes of existence only need the exercise of certain practised faculties, our professional walks bring before us only a limited class of interests, whilst the feebleness of disuse comes upon powers that are removed from the daily habits of our being. There is no form of mental or of moral malady, from sin to insanity, from wickedness to torpor—no *fault* in character—no flaw in our salvation, the salvation, the wholeness which is perfect health—that might not be reduced under this class of evil,—unused, unbalanced powers, with varying culpability as the evil has been voluntary or involuntary.

The *hard-minded intellectualist*, who deals with formulas, not with feelings—with general truths apart from the affections—who would preach the abused laws of health when oil and wine were instantly needed to keep the sufferer from dying—whom any sentiment would only disturb in investigations, of science or of fact, which require no personal intercourse either with man or God—who would exhibit humanity, as a sculptor, in its marble pose, but not, as a painter, with colour, shade and blended lights of innumerable meanings—is preparing partial death for himself by that exclusive cultivation. He is alive only among things that have no feeling of him ; and has his senses exercised only where for the most part other men see nothing. In times when we want support, not from the intellect, but from the heart—when we want, not knowledge, but fellow-feeling—when we want around us living representatives of God and of His goodness to us—when the remembrances, or the effects without distinct remembrance, of kindly human sympathies, of helpful brotherly deeds, of spirit sharpening spirit, of something given, of something done, to assist the feeble and the weary, to lighten the burden of daily care, of some services and of some gratitude, would be sweeter than dignities, dearer than renown, nearer to our *life* than all speculation and all antiquity,—then should the sad question arise, “Why art thou disquieted within me?”

the explanation must come from that neglected portion of the field of our nature where we had dug for no treasures, sought no springs of living water, raised no altars of sacrifice, kindled no fires of household warmth, sowed no seed for God to return a thousand-fold into our bosoms.

The *visionary*, the sentimentalist, the voluptuary of emotion, the *phantom* man, whose existence is of "the stuff our dreams are made of"—all whose wealth of expressed feeling is but the elaboration of his intellect on forms of the imagination—who, instead of using such rare and beautiful gifts from God's rich power for the grace and elevation of common cares and duties and all the hard necessities of life, withdraws, for the sake of their direct indulgence, from the work and friction of the real world—has his thin being, superior as he may think it, quite apart from that way of glorified human life on which the true Saviours are seen stooping to wash men's feet—and Samaritans fall in with wounded men—and those are held the greatest who are the most helpful in service—and the divinest light and grace from Heaven is seen to rest for evermore upon the face of One who lived with common men, and knew all humiliations, and died upon a cross.

The *worldly-minded*, who has one interest, through whose whole being there runs a single stream of satisfaction, and that from no perennial source—the *sen-*

sualist, whose soul only occasionally troubles his foul life—are guilty, and are deprived of hope and of joy in the proportion in which they live upon meat that perisheth, and the circle of their being, which God made so large, contracts to a vanishing-point.

Our nature has many springs—it is “the many-fountained”—each capable of a different form of life, and rewarded by emotions peculiar to itself. God has laid the burden of our blessedness upon no one of these, but upon them all working harmoniously; and to transgress this provision of His by practically declaring that one portion of our inheritance shall suffice for that we will cultivate and use no more, is to go round the fountains whose flowings make our life, to close the most of them, and yet still require that the vessels of our peace shall be full. God gives us a nature made in the image of His own, from which to draw our share of His Beatitude—and we, rejecting the liberality of His gift, think it enough to live in a corner of our being. Nor will even that corner be rich in its own fruits, any more than our fields will bear well their own products unless open to the skies. That our nature contains a capability is surely an expression of God’s Will that we should develope it—not, indeed, to a high state of practical perfection, for that may be impossible, but at least to some discernment and enjoyment of His goodness and glory in the things of which it is the organ. It

is impossible to suppose that God planted in us faculties whose life and growth are not necessary to our fulness of good ; and yet either this must be the case, or we are resigning large portions of our natural blessedness. Suppose a man, to whom the Heavens say nothing of the glory of God—for whom the Day has no speech, the Night no knowledge, and the Stars are no more than “patines of bright gold”—for whom Art has no language through eye or ear, and puts no instrument into his hand—to whom Nature speaks no spiritual word—to whom History is a blank, the Past a dark curtain, behind which nothing is seen—who has no materials from which to picture what has been, to speculate what is to be—to whom all the Sciences are sealed—to whom Books are dead letters, with no companionship of spirits—to whom Literature is dumb, Poetry an unmeaning puzzle or an idle song—to whom the Earth has no life, no revolutions, no youth, no antiquity, no future, no wonderful workings of God in its animate and in its inanimate things—to whom an Enthusiasm in the pursuit of anything, of Truth, Beauty, Goodness, Philanthropy, Knowledge, Art, Trade, Politics or Civilization, is unknown, but who had by nature the average gifts and wants of ordinary men—suppose this—the supposition is not extreme, it is very easy—and how is it possible for that man’s heart to sing with perpetual joy, or what sign of promise would be left to him if neglected and aveng-

ing Nature did not gnaw at him, if in the stagnation of his life he had not continually to say to his soul, "Why art thou cast down, and why art thou disquieted within me?"

Of course this is far from applying fully to every one whose soul is disordered, but it has some relation to us all. When we are inwardly disquieted without knowing why, we need to be healed by Work, work of the heart, work of the mind, work of the spirit, or work of the hand—by some fresh activity of pursuit or sympathy, to give us that earnest interest in worthy things which is richer than pleasure. What so often keeps men lingering near the seats of gain, long after acquisition has ceased to be a keen desire, but the want of any other great aim in life? It would not be just to say that this was always the reason, for a position of large success in business may be the widest a man can have for doing good himself, and influencing others for good, for making his spirit felt through every class and every interest of society: nor is the position in any way incompatible with great variety of thought, pursuit and sympathy. But the man who can so use his place, when at last he reaches it, did never, in the previous years, lose his soul or his mind that he might gain the world: if he had, he would retain his place to the end, not because it gave him great opportunities, but because no other life was open to him.

And in society, is there not many a life wasted and vapid, many an old age which cannot be called venerable, because of the absence of spiritual resources, of dignity of thought, of religious wisdom and acquaintance with the ways of God, of that knowledge of our fellow-creatures which is the basis of beneficent action towards them, of instructed sympathies with the interests of mankind, of grave and weighty cares? Is there not often a poor tone in conversation, and a relief sought from weariness in a devotion to trifles—not because low things are really preferred, but because nothing else is easily supplied and time hangs heavily? Is there not discontent and gloom, though the spirit looks abroad and, ignorant of its own poverty, wonders what it wants? Are there not trials of temper, little things treated as if they were great things, perversity and fretfulness which would never be known if our minds had been rightfully exercised and our hearts were worthily filled? Take even a life of pure affection: how insipid would it become if heart, mind, soul and strength, did not work together! Look to the love for God that Christ requires from us, knowing that no other love could live for ever—a love not from or with one part of our nature, but from and with every part of it!

And some earnest enthusiasm of life is the effectual cure for all disquiet. There will always be minor cares and troubles for those who are at leisure to attend to

them ; nor can we be rescued from these except by interests and pursuits that take us out of their region. If a man was to spend his time in watching and correcting his faults of temper, he might give himself up to smallness for ever ; but if he could be filled with the zest of devoted and instructed work in the service of any large affection, sweetness and goodness would begin to dwell with him and pettiness vanish away. For despondency and disquiet, like all other evil, are not positive things with which you can contend directly: you cannot seize them and destroy them : they are simply the absence of full and blessed life, and you can dispel them only by happier, richer occupation, as you dispel darkness by letting in the light. All spiritual uneasiness is only negative—the absence of what ought to be with us : you cannot take it and eject it, but you can leave no room for it : to reason with it is only to acknowledge it to be a real thing, which it is not : to sweep and garnish the house of your soul will not deliver it from spiritual unrest, if it is empty of Love and of God ; but the presence of Love and of God will flood the whole temple with peace. We cannot encounter the world on its own ground in any of its forms : if we do, we shall be worsted in the combat ; but through better loves and better cares we can carry a charmed life and pass unharmed.

It is on this account that all lives occupied by some enthusiasm, by some intense pursuit, are so full of

blessedness. Thus there is, perhaps, no happier man on earth than a true artist who lives for his art—whom all knowledge and all purity subserve—in whom the real and the ideal mingle in wholesome proportions—the discernment of his eye, the thought of his mind, the creativeness of his spirit, the labour and cunning of his hand—whose joy is his duty, and whose duty is his joy. And so of every form of life in which there is some enthusiasm, some sense of being engaged with the inexhaustible things of God : Philanthropy, when it is the charity that fills a man's being with thought and love ; Science, when it is a worship ; Religion, when it is a thirst for all perfection, and a thankfulness that sweetens every morsel of our daily bread.

Enthusiasm, as a constant working power in life, is perhaps not at our command : but to know God—to love Him altogether—to live in the light of His countenance—to be satisfied with a little in some directions, because in others we have so much—to receive all things hopefully because they are from Him—to take the peace of resting in His goodness—to desire all the day long, “ Oh that my heart were as Thy heart, and that wholly ! ”—these are open to us.

Then, “ Why art thou cast down, oh my soul ! and why art thou disquieted within me ? Hope thou in God : for I shall yet praise Him who is the health of my countenance, and my God.”


XXIV.

Quiet from God.

JOB xxxiv. 29 :

“When He giveth quietness, who then can make trouble?”

THERE are those who make trouble for themselves, and are robbed of the quietness God gives, by a haunting sense of insecurity of tenure. The elements of their peace are not permanent ; and while they last are troubled by the fear of disastrous change. With such, the goodness of God would seem to be precarious, always requiring to be made out anew in relation to present fortunes, to the clouds that are passing over their sky—to be believed when they are happy, to be doubted when they are troubled. We have all to confess how little we possess our souls in peace, what small confidence we have in the sure foundations of our repose or joy of spirit, how much more we *fear* ourselves to be at the mercy of circumstances than we really are. How few walk in the filial faith of Christ, that in God there is no darkness at all, no cloud upon His love, no speck of unfatherly purpose towards us,



that could throw an undefined shadow on our spirits ! How many of us live in apprehension of evils that never come ! To how many periods of our lives can we look back that were overcast, and almost lost to us through fear and want of trust—distrust of God, distrust of one another—knowing now that they might have been passed in almost radiant bliss, if we could have swept the unreal spectres from our thoughts ! Notwithstanding the inevitable changefulness and insecurity of outward life, through what long tracts might the river of our being have borne us on full tides of peace, if we could have divested ourselves of Peter's fear that we were about to sink, that the waters would rise above us and overwhelm our souls ! I suppose there are few persons who do not feel now in regard to past years, that through want of faith they threw their own shadows on God's sunshine ; and how blessed all those years might have been if they had drank the cup which each day presented with a thoughtful consciousness of how full it was, if not of joy, at least of the waters of life, believing for all the coming days that each would be sufficient for its own evil. If many of us were asked why in bygone days we did not take the quietness that God gave, seeing that no great calamity has come upon us, I believe we could give no answer, except that the shadow of an unbelieving fear was upon our hearts.

Nor is this spirit of apprehension, this timid or scrupulous abstinence from the present certainty of waking bliss, the best preparation for the inevitable shadows which God Himself throws upon the happiest lot. One who is pallid in the sunshine is not likely to be radiant in the shade. One who in the full light of day will not fill his heart with peace and gratitude, is not likely in the night of trouble to stay his soul on faith. One who in green pastures and by still waters will not taste and see that the Lord is gracious, will scarcely know it when in the shaded valley He hides His face. One who enjoyed no calm, even, tranquil consciousness of God's goodness when it was flowing on through long, quiet years, is not likely to sing His praises when suddenly cast into the deeps—and above all, one who lives timorously and self-regardingly amid the forecastings of his thoughts, instead of freely and earnestly amid the immediate duties and blessings of his being, is not likely to have the energies, the habitual impulses, the supporting memories which, when afflictions come, make inward power and religious confidence, not a new acquirement to be sought then for the first time, but simply the identity of consciousness, the continuity of life, the onward flow of being. The constancy of a man's spirit to its habitual deep-seated directions is his support and stay in the viscissitudes of existence; and he who is gratefully active amid the mercies of

his God, is not likely to have the sentiment of his being altered towards the same God when He leads for holy ends through some midnight hour of sorrow. "I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times. Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath He in anger shut up His tender mercies? And I said, This is my infirmity: but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High." Of course this relates not to the instincts of happiness to which men may surrender themselves like animals; nor to an unreasoning confidence that to-morrow will be even as to-day; but to a thoughtful realizing in untroubled times, in the long peaceful years of life, of the security of our moral blessedness and of God, who is its source, until it becomes impossible that we should direct towards the Heavenly Father any doubting, fearing sentiment, or that we should see Him in two lights.

We forfeit the quietness God gives, when not through sin, mainly perhaps in this way, that from not collecting our interests on the CENTRE and END of life, upon that which alone *is* our life, all our dearest supports come to depend upon the instrumental and variable elements of existence. For what *is* our life? Surely not the circumstances with which we have to deal, but the *souls* that deal with them. Surely not the presence, or the absence, even of beings dearer to us than ourselves, but the unchangeable affections, the

inward and abiding relations of our spirits towards them, whether present or absent. Surely not the sphere we act in, its problems or its projects, the apparatus of temptation and discipline, of joys or pains, that God provides for our education, but the measures of our faithfulness, our growth and work within the assigned conditions. Unless this was forgotten, we could not think so *unreally* of life, or transfer the interest, as we do, from the permanent spirit to the shifting scene. Call to mind the words of consolation which we offer, or hear offered, to those whom God has in any way afflicted. We marshal the alleviations; we number the blessings that are left; we make out a case that after all there are sufficient elements remaining out of which to construct our earthly tent-house of repose. We go round the circumference of life, forgetting the living soul at the centre, at which alone God directs the stroke of circumstance, and for whose health alone any circumstance, or any possible combination of circumstances, has the smallest permanent value. How few of us have the directness and simplicity to pass at once from these low shallows to the great deeps of spiritual life—to offer no consolations of that sort—to insult no tried heart with this wretched worldly arithmetic which shows not one particle of abiding wealth—to rise ourselves, and raise with us the tried spirit, to those true heights from which we see clearly that all the influences of God

tend to no edifice of earthly comfort—that *here* the quietness given of God is in a 'trusting spirit, in right affections, a heavenly hope, a holy will, however for the growth of these He may touch, change and variously marshal, all the moving world around us! It is because we attempt to make our permanent home in interests that are not at the centre, but only among the incidents, of existence, that the tabernacle of our peace is so often broken up. Friends, blessings, joys, all that man's heart clings to, these are *aids* to life, witnesses for God, immediate messengers from His goodness, nourishers of virtue, pledges of heaven; but surely God has left mortal man under no power of mistake; He has taught one lesson since the world began with all the constancy of sacred warnings; He has sought to colour our very souls with the sentiment that the aim and issue of all blessings, as of all privations, is clearness, soundness, trustingness, at the central spirit—Christ's heart, Christ's faith, Christ's will; that in these is the quietness of which, unless he "makes" trouble for himself, a man cannot be deprived. No man who thinks at all, and does not turn away his eyes from the constant facts, can well miss this spiritual view of life; and if he attempts to place the centre of his being anywhere among the conditions in which he is called to act his part, and not within the spirit to which God directs every ray of experience and of light, what can he expect but that all his reli-

ances should break up and vanish with every mortal change? Most of us are deprived of the consolations of Christ simply because we never reach Christ's view of life. Not living for spiritual ends, spiritual aims, spiritual *gains*, do not console us. Making our home in the heart of other interests, the earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved, and there abides no building of God, no house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. If our eye was single *and right set*, our whole body would be full of light, and every new disposition of our lives made by our Father's hand might test, enrich and strengthen, but could not change, the right heart of Obedience and of Faith.

Let us briefly place before us the quietness which God gives—the abiding refuges of divine comfort and rest—the sources of tranquillity from which no man who has ever attained to them need be separated, unless he make trouble for himself,—with the exception of those mysterious cases of mental disorder which are in the hands of the great Physician, and are for our tenderness, but not for our judgment. Let us place before us that interest in life, that spiritual occupation and blessedness, which a man has, inasmuch as he is a man living right with God and seeing with spiritual eyes, and cannot lose.

God's deep well of quietness is the spiritual nature He gives and feeds: our powers of thought, growth, love, communion with the Spirit of the universe: and

the strong blessedness of our being consists in the knowledge and perception that nothing essential can fail whilst we are permitted to draw from these fountains. Until a man feels that in his own soul there may be a peace, unborn of circumstance and passing understanding—an attitude of trustful waiting and obedience towards every possible aspect of God's providence, which can exempt him, not from trial, but from wretchedness of spirit, and exalt his being in the effort to conform to the relations he discerns—he has not yet built his house upon the rock, or reached the foundation that cannot be shaken. Christ said of spiritual man, that "*out of himself* should flow rivers of living water." Look for a moment upon our nature as in itself a fountain of life, as indeed made up of many fountains, none of which can be closed unless our natural relations with God are neglected or distorted. The spirit of man is in mystic fellowship with the universe. *We* are interpreters of Nature because made in the image of Nature's God. If the mathematician and the astronomer can discover the principles on which the Creator made the worlds, it is because human Reason is a ray from the divine; and so the universe is a mediator between man and God, and "we think God's thoughts after Him." As a medium of divine communications—as an instrument for conveying appeals from the creative Spirit to kindred faculties in the soul of man—as a revealer of all

beauty—as a witness to eternal order—as a sphere of work, eliciting powers and hopes too vast to perish, and clearly prophetic because beyond the needs of earth—as a source of rapturous emotions, an unfailing sympathizer in all our highest thoughts—as type and foregleam of heavenly things—the Universe is in permanent relations of nurture to man which, once discerned, nothing can disturb but some gross veil cast over the moral nature by disorder and sin.

And the outward manifestations of God *are* manifestations only because addressed to a spirit that partakes of His nature, and therefore can interpret His symbols. The Soul is His witness, ultimately His *only* witness, for all things else come to have a voice only as they speak *to it*. It is the source of our faith in divine things; and so strong is its natural alliance with God, that even when disordered by sin and neglect it is possessed of a restorative power, makes spontaneous efforts for recovery, struggles to cast off the consequences of abuse, feels the weight of degradation, knows when it is denied its natural air, and sighs for deliverance. If these parts of our nature do not ally us to a kingdom of heaven, to a realm of divine law, we are worse off than if we had only the instincts of the animals; for then we have, what no other creatures have, faculties that mislead, all whose pointings and forecastings are false. But this is not credible, except to the believer in a lying spirit in Nature.

Is the Source of our being less holy than we are? Has the Goodness that wells in the human heart no Fountain Goodness from which it came? Is not the breathing life of Benignity and Purity in *us*, a sign of the infinite measures in which they belong *to Him*? It must not be thought that we make changeable things sources of permanent joy and trust when we refer to experiences of goodness as adequate causes of enduring peace and faith; for the inward experience that God giveth quietness, often as the fruit of suffering, is not changeable, and ought to be enough in all righteous and trusting natures to open springs of joy and confidence that will flow on when external mercies are withdrawn. A susceptible heart, a spirit that knows how to appreciate divine evidences, sees in every touch of God upon pure affection and hope an indication and a pledge of everlasting Good. And this is the Beatitude of a religious heart, that it not only counts but weighs aright the signs and promises of eternal Love. To it a whisper of divine intention, one pure throb of hope and joy, reveals more of God and Heaven than an earthly paradise to carnal men.

The right point of view from which to look upon life is of more importance towards a sustaining relation with God than all external mercies. It is not on blessings received, but on the spirit that receives, that peace depends. The creative goodness of the Father of Spirits may possess the heart when the outward

life is all a struggle. No peace is so stable as that of him who has once risen to a connection with the Divine holiness, and can understand how the chastening hand may exalt and bless. For in this perception of higher purpose we see already everything coloured with benignity, nay touched with glory. We feel the power and the will to bless, and the promise of His Spirit with us that when the inward fitness comes, we shall open into perfect peace. Indeed, how slight are the changes, some of them inward, some of them outward, that would make even this life a paradise! Go through the families you know: touch a temper here, change a habit there, open in this one a new affection, in that a new play of mind, a stream of quickening thought—and what more would be wanting to earthly bliss? There are thousands on the verge of absolute contentment and serenity of soul, wanting only some indescribable thing. How easily, supposing the heart of man prepared, could God make exquisite peace! How conspicuously does He manifest this power in special moments and places! In the better times, and higher forms, of domestic life, we can see what easy changes, coming from some new willingness in us, some fresh influx of faith from Him, could exalt each heart, purify its desires, deepen its sacredness, glorify its love, and bring together all the elements of that blessedness which is the quietness of God,—so quiet, because so full. So also in each moment of our

deepest enjoyment of the natural world we perceive by what slight changes God could introduce a subduing beauty everywhere, soften the air, brighten the sky, temper the elements, throw in the magic of light and colour, and make the whole creation like its most favoured spots. The places on this earth most famed for beauty—the shores of Naples, the lagoons of Venice, the Alpine snows—owe their beauty to the sun ; life passes from them with the warmth of colouring ; the cold form remains, but with the difference between a solar and a lunar rainbow, the body without the soul. And it is so with the *human* landscape, with the human heart and face : it is the light of God upon them that makes their glory and their joy. Everywhere God shows this power to bless and brighten, the tendency of His Will in this direction, as the latent spirit of all His works and ways. What, indeed, makes the beauty of the earth ? In its higher forms, who can hold or describe it ? It is in the power it has to stir mysterious sympathies, forereaching desires, holy longings—that it is a meeting-place for our spirits and the Spirit of our God. And it is so with all the moral aspects of our nature. There is a spirit in them better than the outward life they have. The relations of our human affections are felt to be more divine than the forms they take, the manner in which we sustain them. They are felt to breathe of God even when their offices are unworthily discharged, and the sentiment that is

in them is feebly represented. And he has the noblest heart who never dissevers from these relations, nor if possible from the persons who sustain them, all the beauty and the holiness which their own nature suggests. The very idea of what is involved in the relations of parent, child, husband, wife, brother, as the witnesses to eternal relations whose perfect image is as yet only in the mind of God, exalts the imperfect Present, and presents the Future as a place where all these tendencies shall have their true developments, where all that God suggests as proper to the offices of the heart, shall be found in those that bear them, fully and for ever.


It is true that our present blessings are all touched with sadness, partly through moral imperfection, partly through the mortal side of human nature. It is clearly impossible without some suffering to adjust the relations of a nature that is finite in some of its aspects, and infinite in others. We are constantly falling short, with a spirit that will not suffer imperfection to mistake its ease or its pleasure for the quiet of God.' Immortality itself is a rupture with the present; and the present is dear. Our friends cannot pass into celestial brightness without leaving the earth in new darkness. To heaven, which has, is given; whilst from earth, which has not, is taken away. *Progress* itself, the highest mark of our immortal rank, is a struggle of the higher nature against the lower, a

breaking away from our present place, a higher fellowship, a passing from the seen to the unseen. These are the perishable aspects of an imperishable nature. But where shall we find the quiet of God? With the glory and the sacredness, or with the perishable conditions amid which they are reared?

And, under any circumstances, if the heart is only seeking unto God, desiring to do and bear His will, suffering is not misery. We must on no account confound the pains and woes of our mortal condition, or of our mortal discipline, with a soul that has no peace. Even when full of self-blame, of distrust, and penitential shame, this is a state which is also full of hope. For nothing ought we to be more thankful to God than for this power to blame ourselves—to separate what is good and holy and loving in us—and set it up as a judge over us. For this reproving self is our true self. The man who condemns himself is still safe; God has not cast him off. How strong are the reasons for immovable trust in the hearts of penitent men! They have not been abandoned. God has not taken His Holy Spirit from them. And if our sins and sorrows have taught us wisdom, the offered Paradise is before us still; the threatening sword flames only over against the delusions we would now leave for ever.

And whatever be the sources of our quietness with God, they are in no respect affected by the *class* dis-

tinctions of life. What in these great realities is true of one man is true of all men, so far as condition is concerned. And we wonder more that the working and the toiling, who deal mainly with the essential things of life and being, and are preserved from so much of what seduces the souls of men, should not perceive this truth, than that the prosperous who are tempted on the weak side of our nature by the pomp and pride of circumstance should escape its power. We wonder, above all, that the artizan, if gifted with any measure of spiritual thought, could have his heart embittered, his trust in God shaken, his kindly relations to society endangered, by any kind of outward distinction. For who knows so well as he that his own hands have made the things of which folly is so proud, and that there is no essential worth in them? Pile up as high as you will the outer signs of class distinction—luxury, magnificence, dress, ornaments, equipage, stately buildings, furnishings like a dream of imagination—we can name the trades that wrought them all. Who made the robes in which beauty glides? Will the weaver who made those silks, even if he is half starving, or the lace girl, even if she wrought herself blind, be dazzled by a greatness all the materials of which passed through their own fingers, or, however they may suffer, feel themselves degraded, spiritually humiliated, when brought into comparison with that kind of glory? Surely the class



that made such things is, *so far*, superior to the class that only wears them. Let men know that their greatness is in their relations to God, and no man will build his house of pride on a perishable accident, or be abashed by the privations of his honest condition. There is a wailing, sighing spirit in much of our popular literature, our modern poetry, and in some of our modern philanthropy, that is enfeebling and false, inspired by no high sentiment and teaching no healing wisdom,—like the cries of a child in its bodily experience of a world with which it has some sentient and suffering connections, but on which it has cast no intelligent or spiritual eye. We cannot perhaps exaggerate the sufferings of some portions of society, we cannot sympathize with them too much, nor be too strenuous in our efforts to relieve them ; but we must not lose *a man* in his *condition*, nor suffer him to lose himself. To the compassions of a tender, and the efforts of a wise philanthropy, we must seek to add that confidence in God, that consciousness of a connection *with Him*, which will do more to cheer the spirit than food or wine, and more to raise to self-respect than prosperous surroundings.

And, lastly, I must not shrink from naming the circumstances in which it is most difficult to abide in the quiet of God against the trouble of man : amid the complications of sin, of sin not afar off, but brought very near to us—sin that we cannot hide ourselves

from—sin entering within our innermost circle and mingling with our daily life. We can only cite the case of the great Example who fails us nowhere, to show at least that it is possible to be in daily contact with sin and yet not lose peace with God. Whilst bringing the love and power of God to bear upon it, he could not be without Divine companionship. He had with him, in him, the spirit and the strength of the Comforter. He had twelve men to retain within his holy influence; and, such is man's free will, he did not succeed. Among those twelve there was strife, jealousy, low ambition, avarice, falsehood, treachery, subornation of murder. Yet he could say, "Peace I leave with you : my peace I give unto you ;" and see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied.

In all our relations with others we have to unite his solicitude for man with his trust in God, a zeal ever passing through a baptism of fire with the victory of faith. To unite these two states, the brotherly love that never rests, the restful faith that works miracles, is ever our difficulty, the problem of Christ's perfectness. As we attempt it, as we live in it, "God giveth quietness, and who then shall make trouble?"

XXV.

From the Seen to the Unseen.




2 COR. iv. 16—18 :

“For which cause we faint not ; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding, even an eternal weight of glory ; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen : for the things which are seen are temporal ; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

THERE is a form of Character, most peaceful in itself, most healthful in its influence, chiefly shown in composure of mind, in promptitude and evenness of spirit, with that insight into the nature and the bearings of things which confers a ready power of seeing them as they are, and dealing with them according to the order of their real importance. This frame of character depends on the balance and proportion of the faculties ; it is produced by the happiest blending of mental and of spiritual qualities. It is not Intellect alone ; it is not Goodness alone ; but the constant and active co-operation of a lucid mind, a discerning spirit, a prompt and gentle

heart. The only single expression in our language capable of completely conveying it is the word Wisdom, perhaps the highest term that can be applied to a moral being. Indeed, the Apostle's account of the attributes of Wisdom is a perfect delineation of the spiritual largeness to which we refer: "The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and of good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy." Christ's mind was of that order; not impulsive, not subject to strong agitations from passing things; not shaken by events however trying, by insult however rude, as though any possible part of God's providence could take a thoughtful spirit by surprise; never admitting even the temporary predominance of unqualified emotion, of untempered views of life and destiny;—of that largeness which stands prepared for all things, capable of passing from what is greatest to what is least without abruptness or violence to nature, dwelling in that calm wisdom which is never at the mercy of circumstance, cast out from the comfort and direction of guiding principles.

This is the form which all spiritual greatness assumes; and it stands essentially opposed to passion, to feverish excitement, to storms of emotion, to the tyranny of accident or fortune, to transient and unruly affections. It is never strange with God; it has long looked beneath the surface, and known the whole coming



order of His ways. We call this repose of spirit ; but all such repose is the opposite of inaction, for peace is the fulness of power. Human intercourse affords nothing so strengthening as the influence of minds of this order. To be near them is like feeling the protection of a strong hand, a kind voice, a consoling and assuring word in the agitations of childhood. The perturbations of disordered minds sink insensibly to rest in the presence of one who looks on God with that prepared eye of insight and of trust—who never meets His ways with bewildered confusion—of whom, if ever given up to emotion, we perceive that it is not because faith and reason are taken by surprise, or the balance lost, but because, like Christ at the grave of Lazarus, the heart for a time is permitted to have its way ; for in all such moments of intense emotion the true heart is only taking in the full value of what is vanishing from earth, that love, faith and reason may still possess it as type, prophecy and earnest of eternal mercies. How poor and unfitting the common consolations and precepts of life are at once perceived to be when offered to minds of this class ! They have meat to eat that we know not of. They have long since built upon the rock, anticipated the great spiritual passage from the Seen to the Unseen, and given their trust to God ; and their consolation, when they are tried and desolate, is not again to lay bare the

roots of faith, but so "to do, to desire to do, the will of their Father," as to live upon its fruits.


That it is the tendency of every portion of God's ways to produce in us this "wisdom" of the spirit, is seen in the provisions of experience to extend our range of thought and interest, to give distance permanence and reality to purpose, motive, and expectation. By many an experimental lesson, by many an instructive disappointment, by many a natural but deceptive confidence painfully rectified, by many a veil suddenly dropped on the brightness of promise and the joy of possession, by many a simple pleasure and pure affection found to be more precious than all the world besides, does God lead us to this Wisdom ; and to receive these teachings is the province of the spiritual understanding, and indeed constitutes the whole of the higher education of man. Whatever tends to that enlargement of nature which discerns in the Present the seeds of the Future, in the affections of Earth the promises of Heaven, in the Seen the symbols of the Unseen, is of God's most tender care for the spiritual growth of His children. Now everything in the divine ordering of our life would seem to have this direction: to teach us to value things not only for what they now are but for what they mean, for what they disclose of God's intent, for the eternal treasure that is folded in them ; and whoever of us is not



advancing in this Wisdom is manifestly open to the charge of great natural unteachableness, or of great spiritual negligence. For what are the several stages of human life from infancy to age but so many breakings of the shell, so many tests of the transitory and of the abiding, so many passages from the Seen to the Unseen, until God widens around us His own Eternal Being, and our reliance at last is upon no circumstance, but simply upon those inward springs which we know can never fail because they depend upon the faithfulness of the Father of our spirits, in whom their life is? When all things dear and sacred here are valued as earnest and part-fulfilment of heavenly things, of things kindred in their nature to those experienced now but infinitely richer, then our souls are beyond the reach of accident or event, they are safe with their God, and the worst that can befall them is that they have to be tested, they have to live by faith, they have to rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him.

It is characteristic of the stage of childhood that it lives completely in the things that are Seen—that not yet are they sometimes the shadows, sometimes the fore-gleamings, of the Unseen. Hence its peace, for it has not yet outgrown its small world, and no aspiration spoils contentment: and hence its vehement sorrow, for the emotion of the time exhausts its being. Its joy and its trouble are both entire, because for the


time they are its all, with no unsatisfied ideal to break the one, with no clear-eyed hopes to relieve the other. This is the only period within which, without guilt or weakness, we can take things seen for things eternal, and confuse their meanings with themselves : and how brief it is ! There can be peace within the enclosure of childhood, complete of its kind, because as yet there is harmony between its desires and its sphere ; but once that harmony is broken, there is no more resting-place but that of the spiritual mind which rests on the faithfulness of God. The unconscious child and the conscious immortal are the only two beings whose world is commensurate with themselves. Childhood is a morning hour of unpurchased joy before the toil and heat of the day, ere yet the soul has arisen to envelop us in the shadow and the glory of the Future : and old age should be an evening hour of illumined Rest, when the spiritual lesson has been fully learned, the harmony broken for a time restored for ever between the spirit and its sphere, that as life began with the instinctive joys of irresponsible being, it should close with the conscious peace of tested love and ripened faith. But how *many* childhoods do most of us undergo before we attain to that Wisdom of the spirit without which a long life is only a grasping at shadows, to the knowledge that all which we see is but the prelude of what we do not see, the sign and sacrament of the Infinite,—that holy and abiding affec-



tions, gathered amid the perishable conditions of earthly life, are the eternal treasures which Time accumulates upon us,—and that he whose heart is the most richly stored with these, and with the calmest faith can hold them as the pledges of God, is the wisest and the noblest of men! What, indeed, are guilt and blinding temptation but the Seen shutting out the Unseen, a momentary indulgence outweighing an everlasting reality? Or what the Sorrow of our mortal life, when it does not know that it is the shadow of an immortal Joy, but the essential Love of God shaken from our confidence by the withdrawal for a time of its own symbol, as though the eternal God could give His children any blessing, a blessing for their hearts and souls, and that blessing mean nothing permanent! This indeed would be worse than to give us a stone when we had asked for bread: it would be to give us the bread for which we had not asked, and then turn it into stone. Those great Trusts in God which we call religious principles of life are so many homes and refuges for the soul, wherein we rescue ourselves from subjection to apparent things. He is a man of religious principle who can look beyond appearances to the True and the Real, to whom things seen are signs of things not seen, and who looks for the passing away of the symbol that the imperishable Reality may come. And *he* is a man without religious principle, to whom the Present is no more than

it appears, freighted with no eternal meanings, whose righteousness has no root in God, his peace no refuge amid the wrecks of time.

This is the root of our weakness, that none of us have learned so perfectly the true interpretation of life that we pass with speed and certainty from the signs to the things signified—from perishable forms to the enduring realities of which they are God's earnest and promise—from vanishing joy on earth to everlasting joy in heaven—and see in temptation the way to holiness, in death the birth into life eternal. It might seem as if what we call our religious principles never prepared us for their applications, for we quite lose the benefit of a principle if we have afterwards to take up each separate case upon its own merits—if we cannot dispose of the events of life as they occur by rules of Faith—if upon every fresh temptation we have to open anew the argument of Righteousness—and on the ground of the most recent sorrow, with hearts yet bleeding, and nerves shaken, and minds suddenly adrift from their earthly moorings, we have to make good the tender mercies of our God in that special instance, before we have a right to ask Faith to remember its great convictions, and to be at peace. For it is in this way only that a man of religious principle has any advantage over a man of no principle, a man of mere impulse and sensibility. The great question for us all is, Have we, or have we not, these



spiritual principles of life? Do we live by faith, or only by sense and passion? Do we depend on the things that are Seen, or have we learned to make them emblems and prophecies of the Unseen? Whatever, indeed, are our Principles, much will occur in this life to try their strength; whatever is noblest in us must be tested; but that touches nothing essential, or touches it only to invigorate it; for all great sorrow is in the loss of some great blessing, and the depth of affliction only shows how large a pledge of love, how divine a possession, how full an earnest of His will to bless, our God had previously lent us; and it is not the natural anguish with which we part from it which will ever be strongest in the tenderest, but our fidelity to the treasure in the heart, the direction of the eye to where it is, the trust and expectation it has left with us, that God regards.

And whatever may be the mystery of life, none of us can pretend that God takes us by surprise, and has not given us the clue of the divine purpose,—that we suffer unawares. None of us can look upon our life without knowing how it must end: none of us can enter upon its voluntary relations without knowing that there are coming hours which we shall have to meet in the strength of God. And if, yet, we have courage to *meet* those hours—to prepare for ourselves their inevitable coming by the ties we form—surely it must be because the Unseen shines through the

Seen, because a permanent and a heavenly relation is discerned as the divine meaning of the earthly and the perishable one. If that is not so—if that is not to be—if we are not justified in this spiritual interpretation of our life—then all the foundations of Religion in the human soul are shaken into the dust. For in whatever relates to the higher human affections, every true heart discerns that their spirit infinitely transcends the life we give them ; and Faith argues, that God, who leaves nothing unfulfilled, means to bring out of them all the beauty which their own nature contains.

And there is one element of prophetic faith that mortality brings out more strongly than life, inasmuch, at least, as it removes those disturbances of mere circumstance that break the singleness of a spiritual image. Often from the depths of his being a man gives out a clear image of what he is at heart, of what he is in spirit, though his outward life, through stress of circumstance, may be feeble, broken, or discordant. And beyond this, even with those whose whole soul is most fully expressed in their outward life, the expression at best is only partial and prophetic ; there is always something more, indicated, intimated, as the innermost beauty and goal of the spirit, that is not and as yet cannot be expressed. There is no true life that does not reveal a purer, a richer and more blessed life visioned in its depths, seen like lovely grottos in the deep, radiant with light beneath a

heaving and a broken surface. Now, that image is the true man, the real impress and outgoing of his spirit ; and when mortality takes away the troubled setting of circumstance, that is the spiritual portrait which alone remains in our hearts. A thousand outward things, a thousand causes of arrested development, proceeding even from the hand of God Himself, may prevent him weaving it perfectly into the texture of his every-day existence, but the idea of himself he gives and leaves, to which he obviously ever desired to be true, that, though it was but shadowed in his earthly being, is the real, the spiritual man ; and when he dies to earth, that is the image which he goes to realize. Into the after-depths of heaven's progressions we cast no glance now ; enough of comfort for us to know that it is never the imperfect life of earth, however dear that was, which we contemplate as restored ; it is the holiest image that lay mirrored within the outward being, but which the limitations of mortal strength did not yet permit to be, that is gone to gain full life and perfect expression before God. And thus in the highest sphere of divine intimation is the Unseen prefigured in the Seen ; and those upon whom this spiritual stamp is strongest, from whom this indicated portraiture comes forth most distinctly, whom with the least of change it is easy for us to conceive as dwelling everlastingly in the peace of aspiration, are those who when " parted from us " leave their real image with

us,—and, as already caught up into heaven, speak to us of where they are, in the look of angelic beauty, the return of immortal youth, on the face of the dead who die in the Lord.

Does any one believe that these inward, and outward, signs of spiritual things have no eternal realities corresponding to them, that these pointings of the soul point falsely? If so, that is to be without God. He is comfortless, alone, entombed in himself, to whom the expectations of the pure heart are not the inspirations of our Father. Is it not enough to rescue us from the suspicion that spiritual discernment of a prophetic character may be but a matter of individual feeling, and not the Divine Voice in our nature, that such faith is ever strongest in the holiest? If Christ's last prayer could be, "Father, I will that they whom Thou hast given me be with me where I am," must we believe that to that spiritual eye God masked His will by false signs, and suffered His holy one to sustain his last moments with a delusive hope? If our nature when it is most holy points falsely, it has no faithful Creator. When we are believing in Christ because of the echoes he awakens in our souls, we are believing in God. We believe in, and with, the Son, because "the Father draws us."

And, if the spiritual signs are real, Love will remove as many fears as Faith. It is not a genuine love that asks the question, "Will not those who now live in

heaven speedily so far outstrip us poor, blind, children of earth in knowledge, in conception, in purity, that when we go to join them, they may have lost the power of sympathizing with us? From all such self-regarding speculations of the coldly speculating head the appeal lies to any true heart. Who is so poor in feeling as not to know that the deepest personal dependence of one human being upon another, as indeed our own dependence upon God, rests not at all on equality of knowledge, of wisdom, or of power! And if Christ desired his disciples to be with him where he is—if God Himself can love *us*—who *that is of God* will exclude those whom the Father and the Son receive!

But it is not so much on the love that is felt *for* us, as on the love we are capable of feeling, that our spiritual rank or blessedness depends. What *we* may be to blessed spirits is a question that Christian simplicity will not be forward to ask: enough if we are with them where they are and can behold their glory—if we can revere and reflect their goodness—if we can but brighten in their light, and have so kept our own higher life that spirits of Love and spirits of Knowledge, the Cherubim and Seraphim of God, will be able to quicken, purify and exalt us to themselves. That they will be very gracious to us there is no fear, for of all such Jesus is the type, and his prayer is, "Father, I will that they whom Thou hast given me be with me where I am."

And now ours still, for some brief time, is the war with evil. The sting of death is sin. Only a victory of that evil power can separate us from those whose conflict is finished, whose peace is sealed. Hear the prayer of Christ, that no temptation might detach the disciples from his spirit when *he* was no more with them ; and in it hear the prayer of all God's emancipated for those they leave behind : "And now I am no more in the world, but *these* are in the world, and I come to Thee. Holy Father! keep through Thine own Name those whom Thou hast given me, that they may be one, as *we* are !"

The Church of the First-born, the innumerable company gathered from all ages, the Martyrs of old, the Saints who have walked amongst ourselves, invite us to join them where they are. And thus may dear memories and yet dearer hopes, the affections of earth and the sanctities of heaven, conspire to keep us faithful and untroubled until the last day !



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